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Mr Andrew O'Neill
Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Neill

Short inspection of Sion-Manning Catholic Girls' School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2016 with Peter Nathan, 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since that time, standards dipped and recovered and there have been a number of changes in the leadership and governance of the school. In October 2015, the headteacher at the time of the previous inspection retired. An interim headteacher was appointed from March 2015. In November 2015, you were appointed as headteacher. From January 2016, you worked alongside the interim headteacher on a part-time basis, before taking up your post on 1 September 2016. Since the last inspection, a number of new staff have joined the school. In June 2015, the governing body was reconstituted and a new chair was appointed.

In a very short period of time you have communicated, through your personal warmth and determination, a vision for the school that has created a welcoming and calm ethos. You are well supported by senior colleagues and governors. You do not shy away from taking decisive action when it is needed.

Staff and pupils are very proud of the school. Pupils move sensibly, quietly and calmly around the school site, showing respect and consideration towards each other and adults. You are a very visible presence around the school, making regular and helpful 'drop-ins' to lessons to check on pupils' learning. Staff really appreciate this and say that they 'feel more empowered' to improve and develop their practice. The staff spoke positively about the support they had received to help them further their careers and how the school's approach will aid the recruitment and retention of staff in the future. Parents too are very positive about the improvements you have made.

Leaders and governors rightly acknowledge that, before 2016, pupils' achievement dipped, particularly in mathematics, science and humanities. Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able of them, and the school's other most able pupils, did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally. Leaders have taken robust action to tackle this, with evident impact. Improved subject leadership, stronger teaching and improved systems for managing behaviour, assessment and data mean that leaders have successfully reversed the decline in pupils' achievements.

Leaders have successfully tackled most of the areas identified for improvement from your previous inspection. Through key staffing appointments and effective staff training, teaching is now of better quality and this improvement has enabled pupils to achieve well. Overall attendance remains below national levels but the large number of pupils who join the school at different times in the year, some of whom have poor levels of attendance, make vast improvements in attending more frequently. Nevertheless, leaders are aware that more must be done to improve the consistency of subject leadership and to reduce variations in subject performance.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff at all levels place a strong emphasis on keeping pupils safe, through their day-to-day care and through curriculum projects, such as on bullying and e-safety. As a result, pupils feel safe and have a good awareness of safety, including in the use of mobile phones and social media. Pupils report no incidents of bullying.

There is a strong and palpable safeguarding ethos in the school, shown by the very careful attention given to all pupils, especially those who face challenging circumstances or are at risk of harm or exploitation. You and your governors have ensured that policies are up to date and that staff have completed all the appropriate training, including safer recruitment and training in the 'Prevent' duty. The designated lead for safeguarding is assiduous in checking that staff not only understand the recent changes in safeguarding procedures but that they are implementing them effectively. Staff show the impact of training on their practice, for example, when they make sure that pupils who may be in need of additional support get early help.

Staff responsible for safeguarding, behaviour and attendance have ensured that very clear systems are in place to respond to any pupils who are persistently absent from school, and take very effective action in any instances where those pupils may be at risk of harm. Staff ensure that safeguarding records are well maintained.

Inspection findings

- In a very short space of time, you have accurately assessed the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. You, other leaders, governors and staff are extremely clear about the school's vision and how it is to be realised.

- With the support of staff and the governing body, you have already improved systems for managing pupils' behaviour, attendance and academic progress. You have set clear and high expectations for pupils. Staff and pupils have welcomed this positive change. You are building very securely on the foundations that have been put in place over the past year.
- The vast majority of the small number of parents who expressed a view through the online questionnaire, Parent View, were extremely positive about the school's work. Parents consider you to be a 'strong, fair, innovative and dedicated' leader and regard your appointment as a 'good step'. The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website, which is a valuable source of information for parents.
- In 2016, almost two thirds of pupils in Year 11 achieved five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. This success represented an increase on the 2015 examination results of 13 percentage points. Nevertheless, leaders are aware that more must be done to ensure that some pupils, especially those who learn quickly, are challenged more in their learning, for example, in science and the performing arts.
- Leaders have focused strongly on improving the quality of teaching and learning. For example, staff from outstanding teaching schools have worked alongside school staff to moderate the assessment of pupils' work. As a result of this effective action, there has been a considerable turnaround in pupils' achievement in 2016.
- Leaders have also given priority to reducing the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally and this is making a real difference. Between 2013 and 2015, the difference had become wider. Leaders have made more careful use of additional funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are getting better support. Staff are effective in identifying the needs of these pupils and are putting timely action in place to support these pupils with their learning.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be a strength of the school. They gain a good understanding of British values and how people from different cultures contribute to life in modern Britain.
- Despite many positive developments, such as high expectations, clear systems for rewards and sanctions, and better methods for checking pupils' progress, overall attendance remains below national levels. This is mainly due to the absence of some of the pupils who enter the school at different times of the year. The school has a high proportion of pupils joining the school mid-year and some of them have erratic patterns of attendance. The importance of regular attendance at school is not always taken seriously by some parents. Nevertheless, these pupils make great improvements in their attendance levels when compared with those at their previous schools.

- The introduction of a new behaviour policy has reduced the number of exclusions. In the past, the number of fixed-term exclusions was too high. A significant number of these exclusions were for pupils who were new to the school and who have come with more challenging behaviour. More recently the number of individual pupils involved and the number of days for which each pupil is excluded have both reduced. The number of repeat exclusions has also declined rapidly. There has only been one permanent exclusion since the last inspection. Pupils' positive comments, both during the inspection and in a recent survey, reflect their increasing enjoyment of school life and their view that behaviour is well managed.
- Leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching and the atmosphere for learning have been successful. The headteacher has introduced clear lining-up procedures for pupils. These ensure that pupils are ready to learn and that learning time in the classroom is maximised. Pupils say that, 'there is no silliness in class now'. Teachers' careful planning of stimulating activities and their positive working relationships with pupils ensure that pupils are fully engaged in their learning.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and they monitor their learning and progress carefully. Staff make good use of information on pupils' performance to ensure that work is set at the right level, so that they have opportunities to succeed and enjoy learning.
- Governors and senior leaders have taken steps not to use alternative provision and focus on ensuring that all pupils receive their education at the school. This action is to ensure that staff are able to exercise their safeguarding functions in a more timely and effective way.
- Pupils, including the least- and most able readers, read with expression and good understanding. Throughout lessons, teachers regularly refer to key words in their subjects to check pupils' understanding. The school's library provides an attractive resource for learning and study. The setting of regular homework has a high priority, much appreciated by pupils.
- Membership of the governing body is drawn from a wide field of professional expertise and experience. Governors have ensured that the school continues to improve and that the school site is safe and secure.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- work with parents, particularly those of pupils who face challenging circumstances, to improve attendance and reduce fixed-term exclusions still further
- improve the consistency of subject leadership, particularly among newer leaders, to reduce variations in subject performance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the archdiocese of Westminster, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with members of the leadership team, a group of teachers and two groups of pupils. I met with the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors spoke with staff responsible for monitoring safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. Inspectors made a number of short visits to classrooms, accompanied by senior staff, to observe learning. Inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work and observed their behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school site. They reviewed a range of documents, including the single central record of recruitment checks and those related to safeguarding and other aspects of the work of the school. Inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. The 15 responses to the staff questionnaire were also considered.

Following my analysis of the available pre-inspection information, inspectors formed the following key lines of enquiry for the inspection:

- Are leaders successfully halting/reversing the overall decline in pupils' outcomes? What do the 2016 examination results show and what is the achievement of pupils currently?
- How well are the less able and the most able pupils doing? What is the progress of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most-able?
- What has been the impact of leaders on improving the quality of teaching and accelerating pupils' progress?
- Are safeguarding systems effective? What has been the impact of leaders and governors on improving pupils' attendance, reducing fixed-term exclusions and dealing with incidents of bullying effectively?
- What has been the impact of the leadership of the new headteacher?