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Ms Catherine Hughes
Principal
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Lawrence Weston
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Dear Ms Hughes

Short inspection of St Bede's Catholic College

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2016 with Richard Steward, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Pupils, parents and staff all make very positive comments about the culture of care, support and concern for all pupils' well-being and all-round development, as well as their academic achievement. This is a clear strength of the school and testament to your strong leadership and the school's impressively positive ethos and well-established and widely applied set of values.

Pupils join the school in Year 7 with starting points that are well above average. They continue to make strong progress in a wide range of subjects and achieve well in examinations at the end of Year 11, although their achievement is significantly stronger in English than in mathematics. You accurately identified this in your self-evaluation and, with governors, are aware of the need to improve the outcomes for pupils in mathematics. Pupils achieve well in a range of other subjects, such as the separate sciences (biology, chemistry and physics), geography, history, languages and creative subjects. The high quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in religious education was noted in the January 2015 Diocesan report.

The achievement of the small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school still lags behind that of other pupils, particularly in mathematics. Strategies to raise the achievement of these pupils are not yet fully effective in all subjects. The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has

not improved in line with that of other pupils. The report on the previous inspection identified the need to raise expectations to improve the achievement of pupils, particularly the most able. This has been tackled successfully in many subjects and can be seen, for example, in high-level intellectual discussions in English and geography, although the high quality of these discussions is not always evident in pupils' written work. The high level of challenge for the most able pupils is not happening consistently in mathematics or in science in Years 7 to 9.

Your and other senior leaders' evaluation that the performance of the school is outstanding, agreed with governors, is not supported by the quality of the outcomes for all pupils. The evaluation that teaching is at least good and a significant proportion is outstanding, including in mathematics, does not explain some pupils' weaker achievement in a small minority of subjects.

The school's self-evaluation judges that the sixth form is now good. The achievement of sixth-form students rose in 2016, as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and support for students, and was broadly in line with average. However, your sixth-form leaders' analysis focuses too much on the grades students achieved rather than the progress they make from their starting points and other value-added data. This makes it difficult for them to have a precise understanding of what is working well and what needs to be improved further to support the self-evaluation.

Governors are very supportive of you and other senior leaders. They share and make a strong contribution to the positive culture and ethos in the school. They agree with your evaluation of the performance of the school. However, they lack a precise independent analysis of, for example, data and information about pupils' achievement to challenge you robustly about the progress of specific groups of pupils. For example, they find it difficult to explain why they believe that additional pupil premium funding is used well when the achievement of some disadvantaged pupils is not yet good enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors, you and the school's leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are up to date, meet requirements and are fit for purpose. The senior leader who is the designated safeguarding lead is very well informed about all aspects of safeguarding and provides good leadership. Relevant records are detailed and of good quality.

You and other leaders, supported very well by governors, teachers and other staff, have created a highly effective culture that places the care and well-being of pupils at the heart of everything the school does. This ensures that pupils are safe and very well looked after. Pupils and sixth-form students are fully involved in creating and maintaining this culture. The views of pupils are gathered frequently and considered very carefully. Effective procedures ensure that the safety, welfare and all-round development of pupils are paramount to prepare them well for the next steps in their lives.

Governors' attention to safeguarding helps to ensure that it permeates the life of the school. The link safeguarding governor has regular meetings with the designated safeguarding lead to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of arrangements and of staff training. Staff are well trained, including in understanding the 'Prevent' duty to ensure that they are alert to the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Safeguarding is promoted frequently through staff briefings and the school newsletter. Regular reports are provided for the full governing body. Governors are aware of the need to keep the procedures for the safe use of computers and other technology, and the pupils' use of the internet and social media, up to date.

The overwhelming majority of parents believe that the school keeps their children safe and cares for them well. Pupils enjoy coming to school as shown by their good attendance. Pupils are clear about what they need to do to keep themselves safe. Teachers and other staff also strongly agree that pupils are safe. An analysis of all relevant information, such as absence data and records of any incidents of poor behaviour, is undertaken by senior staff and governors. They identify any potential safeguarding or child protection concerns. The high quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the way this is interwoven through the formal and informal curriculum makes a significant contribution to pupils' overall welfare and well-being, tolerance of others and promotion of equalities.

Inspection findings

- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They are extremely polite and respectful of adults and each other. Even during lunchtime, when particular areas of the site are very crowded, pupils' behaviour is safe, sensible and understanding of others' needs. Pupils are keen to learn and mostly respond well to feedback from teachers.
- Pupils make strong progress in a wide range of subjects as a result of good teaching. Work in pupils' books and folders supports leaders' analysis of current pupils' progress and their identification of subjects with strong performance.
- In these stronger subjects, as seen for example in English, geography, music and some sixth-form lessons, teachers follow the school marking policy and pupils are given clear and helpful oral and written feedback so that they know what to do to improve or extend their work. The feedback is matched well to pupils' current and potential achievement. Pupils respond well and, as a result, make further progress. While widespread, this good practice is not fully consistent across the school.
- The way teachers pose questions to probe and deepen pupils' understanding is considered to be a strength by school leaders. There is much good practice. However, this is not fully embedded in all subjects, including in the sixth form. When not used well, questions are only answered by the few pupils who volunteer or they are too superficial to sufficiently check or extend pupils' understanding.

- Leaders identified the weaker performance in mathematics in the 2016 examinations. However, they hold the view that teaching in mathematics is at least good. The work of pupils in Years 7 and 8 shows significant repetition of work completed in earlier years without broadening or deepening their understanding further. In Years 7, 8 and 9, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged to show what they are capable of. Leaders say that the review of the Years 7 to 9 mathematics curriculum will address these concerns.
- An increasing proportion, now the large majority, of pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow courses in the three separate sciences and achieve well. The lack of depth of understanding of those following core and additional sciences shows that they are currently not on track to achieve the target grades they have been set. The work of pupils in the lower years in science shows limited development of pupils' scientific thinking and reasoning skills. As a result, the most able pupils are not encouraged to develop and apply a deeper understanding of key scientific ideas. Conversations with them show that they are fully capable of doing this.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils in the 2016 examinations was low compared with other pupils nationally, and significantly low in mathematics. Although this is improving, there is still variation across subjects in how well current disadvantaged pupils are supported and challenged to achieve as well as they could. This is sometimes done well and these pupils are thriving in high-ability teaching groups. In some other subjects and classes, teachers are not adept at identifying these pupils' real potential so that their progress can be accelerated.
- The overall achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is mostly good, but has not improved in line with that of other pupils. In lessons, these pupils do not always receive targeted support to help them fulfil their potential.
- The number of students staying into the sixth form or joining from other schools has increased significantly since the first small cohort that started in September 2013 and sat their A levels in 2015. Current numbers are close to the school leaders' and governors' targets.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved from the low levels for the first cohort. Achievement in almost all subjects in 2016 was in line with average. However, at the time of this inspection, school leaders had not undertaken an analysis of value-added data, of the progress made by groups of students from their starting points or of any variations in the outcomes for students with similar starting points in each subject. As a result, there is a lack of precision in leaders' understanding of what aspects of teaching and support for students are working well and what need to be improved, for example identifying where subject teachers need to provide better-focused support for individual students to develop their essay writing, mathematical or independent study skills.
- The work of current students shows that the improvements in achievement in 2016 have been sustained. Weaknesses in some subjects have been addressed

and strengths in others further developed. However, there are still variations in the progress made by individual students where the feedback from teachers takes insufficient account of the student's prior or current level of achievement.

- Students are positive about the careers guidance they receive up to the end of Year 11 to enable them to select the most suitable post-16 courses, either in the school sixth form or in another 16 to 19 provider. However, previous poor retention and achievement indicate that this still needs to be improved. Not enough is done to check the retention and success of those Year 11 pupils who follow post-16 courses elsewhere.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the review of the mathematics curriculum leads to a greater broadening and deepening of pupils' understanding so that they build on their prior understanding and make more progress in Years 7 to 9 to prepare them better for GCSE courses
- all teachers accurately identify the potential of disadvantaged pupils, including those among the most able, and those who have special education needs and/or disabilities so that they are challenged and supported to do as well as they can
- leaders responsible for the sixth form undertake a more precise analysis of progress and value-added data so that they focus on those aspects of sixth form provision and teaching that require further improvement.

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, the Education Funding Agency and the director of children's services for the City of Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with the principal, other senior leaders, and the chair and one other member of the governing body. Accompanied by senior leaders, inspectors visited lessons in most years, including the sixth form, across a range of subjects. One formal meeting was held with a group of pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11. Informal discussions were held with other pupils during lesson changeovers, morning break and at lunchtime. Inspectors listened to some pupils read in lessons. A range of documents were evaluated, including the school's self-evaluation and its analysis of assessment, attendance and other information.

Inspectors undertook a range of activities to check the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including reading documents and policies and talking with pupils, teachers, school leaders and governors.

Inspectors took account of the 114 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including 111 with additional comments, and the views of 32 pupils and 45 staff who completed the online surveys.

At the start of the inspection, the following lines of enquiry were agreed with the principal and other senior leaders, and later discussed with governors:

- Do disadvantaged pupils, including those who are among the most able, make the progress they are capable of in all year groups and across a wide range of subjects?
- Are the most able pupils challenged sufficiently to achieve well across a wide range of subjects?
- Do pupils make enough progress in mathematics?
- Has there been any improvement in the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs?
- How well does the curriculum and pre-16 careers guidance ensure that students make good decisions about their 16 to 19 study programmes (in the school sixth form and in other 16 to 19 providers) and how well is this supported by retention, progress and achievement, and destinations data?
- Has the previous weak performance of students in the sixth form been tackled effectively?

It was also agreed that inspectors would check the achievement of pupils in subjects, such as English and science, evaluated as stronger by school leaders.