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Mrs Allison Moise-Dixon  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Moise-Dixon

### **Short inspection of The Palmer Catholic Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 with Katerina Christodoulou, 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 2012.

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

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

You were appointed as headteacher in September 2015, having previously been the deputy headteacher in the school. The experience and knowledge you gained in this role have enabled you to act swiftly in raising standards. Following a review of the school's work, you have acted decisively to bring about positive changes.

You have addressed the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. For example, you have ensured that staff plan their teaching effectively to meet pupils' different learning needs. You are providing further well-considered training for teachers to improve their skills in planning. The most able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress because you have raised expectations for this group of pupils. Middle leaders have been well trained in evaluating information on pupils' progress. They use this information well to hold their teams to account for pupils' outcomes.

Pupils are smartly dressed and show great pride in their uniforms. You have established an ambitious culture of high expectations. Pupils are motivated and focused on their work. They were consistently polite and courteous during the inspection.

During the inspection, we agreed to focus on the leadership of English and the sixth form. We looked at support for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The final area we agreed to review was the provision and uptake of English Baccalaureate subjects at key stages 3 and 4. You are already working on all these areas to bring about further improvements for pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The systems and records for recruiting and checking on staff's suitability are effective and meet requirements. These checks are monitored regularly by governors. There is extensive training for all staff and this is updated regularly, sometimes using external trainers. Following a review by governors, the school appointed a female member of staff as a second designated safeguarding lead. This action was taken to provide additional support for girls in the school. One of the safeguarding leaders has undergone training to provide support for Black African children and their families.

Safeguarding referrals to the local authority are appropriate and timely. The school has recently introduced a new system for monitoring safeguarding and pastoral issues. Concerns are recorded and the new system enables leaders to monitor and analyse effectively to help keep pupils safe. Leaders are aware of local risks and mitigate these risks through training for staff and pupils. Pupils are given guidance on keeping safe through assemblies, workshops and in lessons. Almost all parents, pupils and staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaires say that pupils are safe in school.

### **Inspection findings**

- Pupils who were in Year 11 in 2016 sat their English literature examination in Year 10. This early entry arrangement had a negative impact on the progress and outcomes in English, particularly for pupils from low starting points. A new leader was appointed to lead the English department. Pupils are now no longer entered for GCSE examinations in Year 10. The school's assessment information indicates that Year 11 pupils are making better progress than in previous years. There is now a stable team of teachers in English who are working effectively together to develop a new curriculum and resources. The new head of English has a keen awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the department. Previously, the less able pupils made less progress than pupils with similar starting points in other schools. The English department now allocates its most experienced teachers to classes with the less able pupils in order to enhance their progress. However, it is too early to see the impact of this change in GCSE outcomes.
  
- The English department has developed an effective system for providing

feedback to pupils, which encourages them to respond and improve their work. For example, at key stage 3, there has been a strong focus in providing helpful feedback to pupils to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, it is not consistently applied by all teachers. Also, the focus on literacy, apparent in many of the pupils' books in English, is not yet developed across all subjects.

- Pupils who were supported through the Year 7 reading programme in 2016 made good progress. This programme was discontinued. Governors have now challenged the school to develop and monitor a suitable programme to improve the reading and literacy skills of all pupils.
- Outcomes for girls in academic subjects in the sixth form were poor in 2014 and 2015. In 2016, there was a marked improvement. Recent mock A-level examinations indicate that this improvement is being maintained. The new head of sixth form provides helpful guidance for students in making appropriate choices at A level. Students are monitored regularly for both their attendance and progress. Girls in the sixth form said that they found this advice helpful and supportive. Supervised study in the sixth form is a great strength. During the inspection, over 60 students were observed, engrossed in quiet study. Students are directed to supervised study and additional support by their teachers when they have a difficulty with their learning or are falling behind in their targets.
- The head of sixth form ensures that girls and any other groups who are not making sufficient progress are given additional resources to help them improve. In a mathematics lesson, there was a student who had struggled with a concept in her own class. She was invited by her teacher to join a parallel group of students who were covering the same topic. The student told the inspector, 'this helps my confidence'. The head of sixth form is now working to improve girls' outcomes in subjects such as mathematics and sciences, as historically girls have not been as successful as boys in these subjects.
- In previous years, pupils with low starting points, who are disadvantaged and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities did not make good progress. Senior leaders now monitor the progress of these groups effectively through regular progress meetings. Leaders allocate teaching assistants to departments so that they can offer specialist subject support to pupils. In addition, work-related and entry-level courses provide more appropriate qualifications for these pupils to be successful. The school's assessment information indicates that Year 10 pupils are making better progress. A legacy of poor teaching for pupils with low starting points in key stage 3 had adversely affected the progress of Year 11 pupils.
- The inclusion department provides a safe place for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to go to during social times. This action has reduced exclusions for these pupils and has improved their attendance. Leaders recognise that greater precision in monitoring pupils' progress, from their different starting points, is needed. This is particularly the case for these pupils and those who are disadvantaged. Teachers have not yet developed effective strategies to meet the needs of less able pupils.
- The uptake of English Baccalaureate subjects in 2016 was below the national average. Leaders have developed improved guidance on GCSE choices for pupils.

They have also improved the provision for English Baccalaureate subjects. All pupils now study a humanities subject. The school has experienced difficulties in recruiting teachers of Spanish in the past. Teaching of languages has also been affected by staff absence. Leaders have tried to address this issue by recruiting a languages assistant. The school has taken effective steps to address the uptake of English Baccalaureate subjects, but it is too soon to judge the impact on pupils' GCSE outcomes.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve pupils' performance in languages subjects
- develop an effective whole-school literacy programme
- use greater precision in monitoring groups of pupils from their different starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan McVittie  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, governors and staff. Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally during lessons and social times. They considered the responses from parents, pupils and staff to Ofsted's online questionnaires. There were 41 responses from parents, 69 from pupils and 71 from staff. Inspectors visited 12 lessons, including brief and longer observations, jointly with senior leaders, and listened to a group of Year 7 pupils read. Inspectors carried out a review of pupils' books and scrutinised a range of documents that related to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and progress.