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Mr Michael Walters
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Dear Mr Walters

Short inspection of St Anselm's Catholic School, Canterbury

Following my visit to the school on 29 March 2017 with Alan Powell, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have accurately identified and tackled weaknesses that have emerged since the previous inspection and overseen improvements in many aspects of the school's work. St Anselm's is now very popular and oversubscribed. Practically all the parents' written responses during the inspection were complimentary, praising many different aspects and saying how happy they were that they had chosen the school. They described it, for example, as 'fantastic', 'brilliant' and 'excellent'.

Your leadership, and that of other senior leaders, is rightly respected by staff and parents, who appreciate the increasingly high standards you demand in the quality of teaching and of behaviour in lessons and around the school; both were very strong during the inspection. You ensure that vulnerable pupils, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, receive excellent practical and emotional support. The recent assembly on carers' lives made some pupils realise they had similar responsibilities at home. Staff established meetings for young carers and you are working with the local authority to provide help for them. You are equally attentive to supporting children looked after and pupils who are adopted.

Most successfully, you make sure that pupils and staff enjoy school life and that mutually respectful relationships between them continue to underpin good learning.

Parents' comments describe the school in phrases that accurately summarise what I and my colleague felt during the inspection: 'an atmosphere conducive to happiness', 'providing equality, holistic and inclusive', 'caring but purposeful' with a 'strong sense of togetherness'. Staff are equally enthusiastic about working at the school, saying: 'I am proud to work here' or 'We all believe in the same moral purpose.'

The area that was highlighted for improvement in your previous inspection report was to accelerate pupils' progress and achievement by sharing the very effective teaching that already existed. This has been mainly successful. However, there are some small groups of pupils who make slower progress in key subjects at key stage 4 and in academic subjects in the sixth form. My colleague and I both noticed how attentive and hard at work pupils were in the lessons we visited. We saw teachers skilfully using activities at the start which checked students' understanding before moving on. We noticed that they gave pupils time to think rather than intervening too soon. We could appreciate the value that teaching assistants added to some pupils' understanding and progress. However, we did share with you that a few pupils could take more care over the presentation and detail of their work.

The term after your last inspection, the school joined the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership (KCSP), a multi-academy trust. This gives valuable support and advice to the school at the same time as entrusting decision-making to the school's active and wise governing body. Governors bring much relevant experience to their deliberations and support your work with a thoughtful balance of encouragement and challenge. They are fully aware of aspects of the school's work that need to be strengthened, including the attendance and achievement of some disadvantaged pupils. Governors visit the school regularly to meet pupils, students and staff and to check on improvements that have been introduced.

Governors fully endorse your recent curriculum initiative which I was lucky enough to see in action. Once a fortnight, Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils spend an afternoon following their choice, from an imaginative list, of 'Inspire' courses. To name but a few, these include dance, costume design, touch rugby, outdoor survival skills, animation and cooking. Pupils' and staff's enjoyment permeated all the sessions I visited. Meanwhile, Years 10 and 11 had large and small group sessions on GCSE English and mathematics. You reflect wisely on your curriculum and make your top priority pupils' and students' futures, rather than the school's public examination results. The proportions of pupils and students remaining in education, employment or training at the end of Year 11 or Year 13 are well above those seen nationally. Over 80% of Year 11 pupils stay on into the school's sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders' determined approach to safety is seen in how well all pupils and students are supported and known as individuals, particularly by their form tutors, heads of houses and the special educational needs coordinator. All staff are fully alert to the signs of child abuse or radicalisation, for example, as they receive regular training and updated reminders when necessary.

In their questionnaire, well over 90% of parents said their child feels safe. The personal, social and health education programme is underpinned by the school's strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Both address many 'tricky topics' which can 'change your outlook', as pupils put it. Issues they referred to included e-safety, bullying, extremism, drugs and different lifestyles and faiths blended with Catholic perspectives. The school's application of technology in lessons has increased since the previous inspection. It is supported by giving parents and pupils e-safety advice and links on the school's website.

Inspection findings

- I and my colleague shared the areas of the school's work that we hoped to explore with you. These related to: the small groups of pupils who had not achieved as well as others in English, mathematics or core science GCSEs in 2016; the difference, in recent sixth form outcomes, between the relatively low progress made by those taking academic qualifications, and the very successful vocational ones; and whether the funds to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress and to lower absence rates were being spent as wisely as possible. None of these areas for consideration surprised you as you have already taken steps to tackle them.
- In all three of the GCSE subjects being considered, there were pupils whose results did not match their ability because they had special educational needs and/or disabilities which necessitated staying in hospital for long periods. A few individuals, especially girls, had poor attendance. However, for those pupils needing to retake their GCSE examinations in English and/or mathematics, the school's sixth form does them proud, with a higher percentage attaining the grades they need than is seen nationally.
- In 2016, pupils achieved extremely well in GCSE English literature but this was not matched by the results in English language. Unlike previous years, all pupils' coursework was downgraded so that at least 30 of them just missed out on attaining their expected grades. Most of these pupils had entered the school with low standards in English but they had received the same high-quality teaching and extra support in literacy as in previous years. The school is entering pupils for a different English language examination in 2017.
- The percentages of the most able and other pupils achieving GCSE A* to C grades in the three separate science subjects were above average in 2016. Some pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, taking only two science subjects did not do well. In GCSE mathematics it was a small number of mainly disadvantaged pupils, most of whom had attained average standards at the end of primary school, who did not make good progress. The school knows it must persevere to further strengthen these pupils' confidence and skills in mathematics and science (particularly for girls in mathematics and boys in science).
- Progress in academic sixth-form subjects has not kept up with the increasingly excellent outcomes in the popular, work-related courses. Because you had already identified where last year's results showed improvements were needed, in September 2016 tighter, structured intervention and supervised study sessions

started. They have contributed to raising academic students' aspirations and work ethic. Year 13 students admit they took a while to adjust to this directed time but also admit that they see the benefits!

- You have spent additional funds well for disadvantaged pupils so that differences between their progress and that made by other pupils nationally have diminished every year since the previous inspection. Nevertheless, senior leaders have not identified carefully enough whether the funds could generate even better outcomes, especially in terms of value for money. Many disadvantaged pupils and/or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have the lowest attendance.
- Reflecting on the 2016 outcomes, you appointed an assistant headteacher to probe disadvantaged pupils' barriers to attendance and learning meticulously. She has already produced a map revealing pupils who have long journeys, and clusters of poor attendees. One by one, she is meeting all disadvantaged pupils to plan how to fund their individual welfare and learning needs. She is determined to share this information with all staff and regularly check that, however they are spent, additional funds are making a real difference to these pupils' lives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress improves for the small groups of pupils who underachieve in either English language, mathematics or core science GCSEs, and for sixth-form students taking academic courses
- the allocation of funds and initiatives for disadvantaged pupils, especially those with high absence rates, are monitored and evaluated precisely to generate the maximum effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I held meetings with you, members of your senior leadership team, some subject and house leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and several support staff. I held a telephone call with the KCSP director of

improvement and met the chair and five members of the governing body. We talked to pupils informally around the school and in lessons and held meetings with groups of key stage 3 and 4 pupils. My colleague spoke to sixth-form students and observed a house assembly. Between us, we visited a range of classes across the school, accompanied by a senior leader. In the afternoon, I watched many of the 'Inspire' sessions taking place and briefly saw the head of mathematics giving GCSE examination guidance to about 100 Year 11 pupils. We scrutinised and evaluated documents related to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, allocation of additional government funds and leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and their development plan. We took into account 53 staff questionnaire responses and their written comments, over 130 comments written by parents and 163 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The number of pupils who responded to their questionnaire was too low to be representative.