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Mr Paul McLoughlin
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr McLoughlin

Short inspection of St John Vianney School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017 with Lisa Morgan, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Although only in post for a few days, you are taking immediate actions that continue to build on the work of your absent headteacher. You and your staff have immense pride in the school. You have an unquestionable commitment to providing an environment in which the young people who attend feel safe and make good progress in their learning. Parents overwhelmingly support the school and recognise the positive impact of the high-quality teaching. This is typified by a comment received through Parent View: 'I have nothing but praise for this school and every teacher, teaching assistant and partner to the school. I feel privileged that my son is getting everything he needs in such a stable establishment. All I can say is thank you for being a part of our family.'

Governors and staff share your high expectations and together you have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. These related to the further development of assessment procedures and the effective use of teaching assistants to support pupils' learning.

There is increased frequency of more-focused assessment and recording of pupils' attainment and social and emotional development. This ensures that you have detailed information about how well pupils are doing. However, you recognise that the evaluation of this information by leaders, including those leaders with subject responsibilities, needs further refinement to ensure that governors are kept up to date with the impact of your actions.

Leaders' actions since the last inspection, including additional staff training, have ensured that

teaching assistants have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Consequently, they now work effectively alongside teachers to support pupils' learning.

You continue to work hard to ensure that pupils attend school as often as they can. However, you recognise that further work needs to be done to improve the attendance of some pupils. You and your staff have good relationships with pupils and make school a welcoming and safe place to learn. Pupils who spoke with inspectors value these relationships and have positive views of their school, teachers and teaching assistants. You provide appropriate support for pupils who are unable to attend school due to their complex needs, including home visits by therapists. You also ensure that teachers are in frequent contact with families. Some pupils have low rates of attendance recorded due to how the school records pupils' attendance during transitional timetables.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and are followed closely. Documentation relating to safeguarding and the welfare of pupils is kept meticulously. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Appropriate training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about the potential risks that pupils may face. Staff share information with parents and appropriate authorities effectively to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders follow up any absences rigorously to provide appropriate support to families. This includes providing opportunities for pupils to learn while they are unable to attend school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in school because they know the staff and pupils well. They regularly monitor teaching and use this information to support the effective performance management of staff and detailed development planning. Your development of assessment and tracking systems for your school's context has ensured that you have a clear understanding of the progress that pupils make over time. However, the depth and frequency of leaders' evaluation of the progress that pupils make during the school year is at times more limited and sometimes lacks refinement.
- The appointment of new governors with educational and business expertise has strengthened the governing body since the last inspection. Governors know their school well because of the information that they receive from leaders and staff. They check the accuracy of information frequently through their regular visits to the school. Governors act quickly, alongside leaders, to address any concerns that they have. For example, their rapid and successful action following a hygiene audit of the school kitchen ensured that it scored highly at its most recent inspection by environmental health officials.
- The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. Teachers have high expectation of pupils from key stage 1 to the sixth form. They use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and to guide them to improve their knowledge and understanding. Tasks present appropriate levels of challenge and are well matched to individual pupils' needs. This is particularly so in mathematics, where pupils rapidly grow in confidence and are able to apply their knowledge and understanding to solve multi-step mathematical problems.

- Appropriate training in specialist areas of nurture and autism ensures that teachers and teaching assistants have well-developed skills and strategies. This enables them to meet the challenging needs of pupils effectively when they arise.
- Teachers manage the high numbers of teaching assistants working in their classes well to provide good support for an individual pupil's needs. Teaching assistants are highly committed and skilled practitioners who use their specialist knowledge effectively to support and nurture pupils' development. Teachers and other adults consistently promote learning and development by their enthusiasm and through carefully designed activities, which makes learning fun and accessible to all. For example, in one class in the upper school, pupils eagerly demonstrated a game that they had devised that involved them working collaboratively within their own set of rules to stop a balloon hitting the floor. Teachers use assessments well to evaluate the progress that pupils make to inform their planning, even though this can be in extremely small steps.
- Pupils develop their knowledge and independence well through appropriately challenging activities. These prepare them well for the transition into adult life. The activities also provide them with accredited qualifications. There are opportunities to undertake appropriate well-planned work experiences and develop independent travel skills. Pupils study a range of subjects, including literacy, numeracy, construction and hair and beauty. Nearly all pupils leave the school to undertake appropriate vocational courses in local colleges.
- You have established an expectation of high attendance within the ethos of the school and monitor pupils' attendance closely. As a result, you are aware that pupils' attendance is below the average of mainstream secondary schools nationally. You are also aware that the rates of persistent absence in the school are higher than the national average. Pupils are typically unable to attend for good reasons. These are often linked to their emotional needs, their mental health and their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some pupils have low rates of attendance recorded. This is often due to how the school records pupils' attendance during their transition into the school when they follow amended timetables that are agreed with local authorities placing pupils in the school. When pupils are unable to attend for any extended period, they continue to receive access to education because you provide appropriate support from teachers and therapists in pupils' homes. Additionally, you ensure that, where appropriate, well-planned and appropriately staffed temporary transport to and from school is provided by the school. This often allows pupils to overcome crises and return to school to continue their learning and development. However, you are not complacent and recognise that pupils' learning is limited when they are not in school. You agree that further improvement in attendance rates is a priority for a small number of pupils who are absent without good reason. You have recently appointed a family liaison officer to further strengthen the good links between home and school and to enhance pupils' attendance. However, it is too soon to see the impact of her work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- evaluate more effectively the impact of their actions by refining the depth and increasing the frequency of evaluations of assessment data, including those undertaken by subject leaders
- consider how they will make best use of the newly appointed family liaison officer and other strategies to improve pupils' attendance further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of education of the diocese of Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and members of your senior leadership team and with governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with officers of the diocese of Salford who are trustees of the school. Inspectors spoke with some pupils during lessons and around the school and had a meeting with a group of staff. We took account of the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents and staff. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspectors visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, and looked at their work in books and their records of achievement. We reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. We scrutinised the school's self-evaluation document, action plans and other policies. We looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, recruitment checks and record-keeping.