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Dr Simon Uttley
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Dear Dr Uttley

Short inspection of Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Charles Joseph, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since arriving in January 2017, you have restructured your school teams to make teaching and learning a priority for all staff. You have made a real difference because you have identified clearly why further improvements need to be made and how these are going to have an impact on pupils' outcomes. Your open, honest and inclusive approach to leadership means staff now have clear roles and responsibilities. They now have a much clearer understanding of what makes great teaching and effective feedback to pupils and what outcomes they need to achieve for pupils with different starting points.

In recent years there have been many changes of staff and school leaders have found it difficult to find strong teachers to replace those who have left. Since joining in January 2017, you identified that a few teachers were not very effective and there were too many vacancies in the school. You made the decision to work closely with training providers to try to conquer this problem. As a result, your school is now well staffed with subject specialists who support your vision of effective classroom practice and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.

The governors have welcomed your open and honest approach. They are now more aware that processes in school need to be secure and effective in order to improve

pupils' outcomes in the future. Governors have welcomed the results of the independent reviews into safeguarding, the sixth form and the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This has given them new insight and has helped them to challenge school leaders on the progress of different groups of pupils, in different year groups. They also recognise that strong teaching staff are needed to ensure consistent outcomes.

There is a strong Christian ethos that permeates the school. The school values and recognises each pupil as a unique, special individual who deserves the opportunity to learn and grow in a community where all are cared for. Respect, dignity and equality of opportunity are inherent in the day-to-day life of pupils at the school. These values underpin the inclusive culture across the school. The school is calm and well organised. Staff know their pupils well, and have high expectations of pupils' conduct. Pupils are well behaved, respectful and friendly to one another. Behaviour continues to be typically superb.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified the need to improve the consistency and quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers planned lessons to match the ability of their pupils, checked pupils' progress using effective questioning and shared the good practice in marking and assessment of pupils' work. In addition, inspectors asked leaders to focus on improving the sixth form, curriculum and quality of teaching so that more students completed their A-level courses and entered the next phase of their education, employment or training successfully.

Leaders have taken, and continue to take, effective action to address these recommendations. Consequently, given the recent changes in staffing, there is a renewed focus on teaching and learning and continual professional training to ensure that teachers are reflective and develop their own best classroom practice. This helps them to identify the impact of strong planning on the progress of different groups of pupils. As a result, pupils understand and can explain what they are learning because their teachers share the key objectives and success criteria of the lesson, in line with school policy. Most teachers use the school policy on marking effectively so that pupils can see what they need to do to further improve. Pupils' books are well looked after because they enjoy their learning. Consequently, teaching is improving but it is not consistent in all subjects.

Leaders identified that the sixth-form curriculum was too narrow for some students. Changes now support different routes for students and they can now follow a vocational route as well as traditional A levels. You also identified the need to widen students' research, analysis and communication skills. Recently, you added the extended project qualification to the Year 12 curriculum. Students told inspectors they are enjoying this new challenge. Leaders have invested in a team of staff including a dedicated sixth-form manager and head of sixth form to follow up on attendance, progress, work placements, use of study time and next step careers. This is helping some students attend more frequently and gain university places or jobs locally.

Students' outcomes at sixth form have improved, since the last inspection, but they

are still not as strong as you would like them to be. Students studying vocational qualifications make stronger progress than those studying traditional A-level courses. You have identified that some pupils were still not attending as often as they should, while others had been accepted onto courses which were too challenging for them. Consequently, you have changed the school day, expecting all students to be on the school site all day. This is improving their attendance. You have also tightened the entry requirements so that students follow more appropriate courses.

In 2016, the overall progress of pupils at the end of key stage 4, including that of disadvantaged pupils, was above national averages. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment, made strong progress in English and mathematics, achieving outcomes higher than others nationally with similar starting points. Some pupils studying humanities, technology and the creative arts made less progress in these subjects than other subjects. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have not made the same rapid rates of progress across a range of subjects.

Provisional information on outcomes of pupils in 2017, at key stage 4, indicates that pupils' attainment and progress in English remain a school strength. Improvements in literacy are enhancing the progress pupils make in their humanities subjects. However, there has been a decline in progress in some curriculum areas, including mathematics. While the most able pupils are now making accelerated progress in most curriculum areas, those with low prior attainment are making less progress than in previous years.

In 2017, a group of pupils with very complex issues had a negative effect on school outcomes. Many of these pupils were disadvantaged and had special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some had refused to engage with education over a number of years. The actions taken to support a number of these vulnerable pupils did not help them to re-engage with their education. Since joining in January 2017, you have begun to tackle why some vulnerable pupils disengage from school life. You have changed the school day, enhancing the pastoral role of tutors so they focus on each pupil's well-being as well as their academic success. You rightly see the importance of developing a positive attitude and a healthy mind as the key to increasing the progress of vulnerable pupils. Pastoral leaders have created a team of 'peer supporters' to befriend pupils who may feel isolated. Actions taken are improving the attendance of vulnerable young pupils and increasing numbers are engaging in their curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Specifically trained safeguarding staff ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff receive safeguarding training periodically throughout the year to keep up to date. Governors routinely check that all processes and policies meet requirements and that school records are thorough and complete.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and feel safe at school. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are well cared for and safe at school. The school's work in educating pupils about the risks of drugs, alcohol and child exploitation and about e-safety takes a high priority throughout the academic year. Pupils say that bullying is rare but is dealt with effectively should it occur. They are confident about who to go to if they have a concern.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the consistently strong outcomes in English at key stage 4; the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; the quality of learning; and sixth-form provision.
- You rightly identified that the continued successful teaching of English across the school is due to effective subject leadership, and the consistent application of the school's teaching, learning and assessment policy. In the lessons we visited, teachers used a range of techniques to check on the progress pupils make, including effective questioning and useful feedback. We saw how pupils who were disadvantaged made similar progress to other pupils. Your English team work well together, to plan strong lessons, analyse outcomes and share good practice. This consistent approach has improved, and continues to improve, the progress of pupils and disadvantaged pupils, including the most able.
- Your history and religious education staff have mirrored the approaches used in English. This has improved pupils' outcomes in these subjects.
- Some of your pupils join Year 7 with low literacy skills, often because they speak English as an additional language. Senior leaders previously identified the need to remove this barrier as quickly as possible. The accelerated whole-school literacy programme developing pupils' love of reading and improving their writing skills is enabling these pupils to access the taught curriculum more readily.
- You and your team have identified that some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making progress in some subjects, in line with all pupils nationally. You have noticed that the majority of these pupils are also disadvantaged pupils. You have recently reviewed how you use pupil premium funding in order to support disadvantaged pupils: breakfast club, to give pupils a healthy start to their day, combined with pastoral support to work more closely with pupils whose attendance is low. This is helping to improve the attendance of vulnerable pupils.
- Some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils often begin in Year 7 with low aspiration and self-esteem, as well as poor literacy and numeracy skills. The intervention strategy to support pupils' literacy has been a success and you are now using a similar model to develop pupils' numeracy. You have recently changed the way teaching groups are arranged in Year 7 to enable pupils to catch up and settle into secondary school life. You have implemented new inclusion strategies, for example using

the therapeutic space within the special educational needs area, to tackle self-confidence and improve pupils' belief in their own abilities, so that they succeed. Vulnerable pupils are actively engaging in these additional programmes, drawing on the expertise of school staff to help them tackle concerns.

- Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan follow a bespoke curriculum to support their individual needs. The school's specialist unit for pupils with Asperger's Syndrome, 'The Base', develops pupils' confidence and strategies to cope in school. The inclusive nature of the school means this group of pupils are well integrated into lessons and contribute to the wider community.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement continues to focus on improving the consistency of teaching and learning across all subjects so that:
 - teachers' planning challenges pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities appropriately, according to their different starting points
 - all staff implement effectively the school's agreed policy on teaching and learning to accelerate the progress of pupils
 - pupils with low numeracy skills are quickly identified and appropriate actions are taken.
- sixth-form outcomes continue to improve for students studying traditional A-level courses and vocational courses, by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan effective lessons to challenge and deepen students' knowledge and understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Walshe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, the chair and representatives of the

governing body. We met with your coordinator for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and a group of middle leaders. We met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning. We also met with sixth-form students to listen to their opinions on the provision made for post-16 education in your school. An inspector spoke to your local authority representative.

Inspectors visited 17 lessons, in a range of subjects and year groups, with you and/or members of the leadership team and head of sixth form. We examined a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school development plan, governors' minutes, and information about current pupils' progress, including sixth-form students, and pupils' attendance and behaviour. Inspectors considered 22 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 20 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 12 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.