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Mr David Smith
Principal
Blue Coat Church of England Academy
Birmingham Street
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Blue Coat Church of England Academy

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2018 with Mark Henshaw, 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 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 created an inclusive and purposeful environment. Blue Coat is a 'welcoming school'. Pupils enjoy school. Staff are proud of the school. They believe that there is a culture that encourages calm and orderly conduct and is aspirational for all pupils.

Your appointment in September 2016 provided leadership stability following two interim headteachers in the previous two terms. You show commitment to improve standards through high-quality teaching and learning. You also want to support staff well-being and their motivation. There is a determination to focus upon a small number of important objectives, such as attendance and the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Previous focus areas, including science, the curriculum and staffing structure, have been developed effectively. Change and improvements are sustainable and prioritised.

Pupils join the school with low attainment. When they leave Year 11, most make similar progress to pupils nationally with comparable starting points. This includes English and mathematics. Boys and girls make similar gains in their learning. A majority of pupils speak English as an additional language and they make good progress. The recent strong improvement in science is notable and contributed to overall achievement. Nevertheless, you, your leadership team and governors know that there remains work to do in other areas of the school. Disadvantaged pupils' achievement has been low, and there has been too much variability in the performance of a small number of subjects. Also, while attendance is improving

for all groups of pupils, some pupils have long-term absences which limit their success.

Some of your families at school are transient and this results in their high mobility. For example, in 2016/2017 over 30 pupils left the school, the majority to move to other parts of the country or abroad. Some of these pupils were in their final GCSE years. You and your staff manage this well, although it does have an impact on outcomes and attendance figures.

You, your team and governors display commitment to the school. You understand its strengths and what needs to improve. You address areas of current concerns, while dealing with issues identified in the previous inspection. For example, you acted on inspectors' advice to improve the quality of data used by leaders, and to provide wider opportunities for sixth-form students, including work experience. The school has continued to improve. There is clear direction, shared purpose and a strong sense of community.

Grounded in Christian values, the school is welcoming to pupils of all faiths or none. A friendly atmosphere is evident, including in how pupils treat one another in lessons and at social times. Positive relationships are also seen between pupils and staff. Pupils are polite to visitors and speak highly of their school community. Older pupils note improvements in recent years, particularly in teaching quality. All pupils spoken to, and all staff who replied to Ofsted's survey, are unanimous that the school is a safe environment. Parents and carers value what you provide. This is shown by pupil numbers increasing and that there is now a waiting list for places.

Governors are crucial in both supporting and challenging leaders. Very well led by a wise chair, governors are knowledgeable about the school and ambitious to see continued improvements. Most governors saw the period of leadership instability and want to ensure that this does not happen again. Governors and leaders are well supported in their work. This includes a safeguarding governor who is in full control of her brief. There is close work with a capable school improvement partner commissioned by the sponsors, the Church of England Central Education Trust and Holte School, from St Chad's Academy Trust.

Pupils' well-being is at the heart of your work. During this inspection, the school held one of its regular 'personal development days'. Teachers and local community representatives, including the police, deliver lessons and workshops. These include sessions on keeping safe, opportunities for volunteering, understanding current affairs and the legal system, money management and study skills. Pupils' engagement in these learning activities was evident. Materials provided by teachers were well matched to pupils' abilities and interests. Inspectors observed literacy and numeracy lessons during tutor periods. Time was used well and pupils were fully involved.

Productive partnerships with other schools are well developed. You work with primary schools, looking at their curriculum, sharing training and discussing how best to support vulnerable pupils and families. Primary schools use your resources, including the 'Success Centre' and computer suite. Expertise is shared with other

secondary schools. For example, you provide support to improve science and receive advice on design technology. You chair a faith-based cluster group of schools which was set up to share good practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Policies, processes and practices are very well established and effective. Pupils in need of support are identified quickly. Appropriate and timely help is then offered, including to families if required. All support is monitored, including strong governor oversight. Leaders are aware of any issues within the local community and work closely with external agencies. The local authority recognises the high quality of these partnerships.

Pupil safeguarding records are detailed and recruitment systems are rigorous. Staff are well trained and vigilant. All pupils spoken to feel safe under their care. Pupils can explain how they learn to keep safe and to check risks. This includes knowing the importance of maintaining and respecting British values, keeping themselves safe online and within relationships. Pupils say that there are pupils known as 'Blue Coat Guardians' and trusted adults they can approach if they have concerns, and that matters are resolved quickly and successfully. All staff who responded to Ofsted's survey feel that the school is safe and that any instances of bullying are well dealt with.

Together, senior leaders, governors and staff have ensured that safeguarding arrangements have the highest priority and are fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- In 2016 and 2017 disadvantaged pupils who left Year 11 made far less progress than other pupils nationally. Inspectors focused upon how effectively leaders and managers ensure that current disadvantaged pupils make at least the progress of which they are capable. The principal's decision to lead on, and be directly accountable for, disadvantaged pupils' performances this year indicates how seriously the matter is taken. Leaders have looked at best practice across several schools and provided training for staff. Teaching staff are now held closely to account for outcomes gained by disadvantaged pupils. Each disadvantaged pupil is identified, their needs assessed and funds used to give additional support, as required. Governors are informed of pupils' progress via their teaching, learning and student welfare committee.
- School assessment data indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making gains in their learning. Pupils' books show that they now make better progress. Teachers set tasks matched to pupils' abilities and the standard of work matches target grades set for pupils. Nevertheless, leaders know that there is more to do.
- Improving pupil attendance noted during the previous inspection had continued up until 2016. It then fell to below the national average. Current attendance has improved for all learner groups and is now close to the national average. Leaders pointed to a range of close tracking, supportive work in the 'Success Centre' and incentives, which have improved attendance. Improved teaching and involving

pupils more in their learning are also major features in encouraging higher attendance. Although decreasing, the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent is higher than the national average. Leaders accept that absence must not become a barrier to ensuring even stronger rates of progress for pupils.

- Pupil's behaviour had been good during the previous inspection. Since then, although falling, levels of exclusion were above the national average. Behaviour is calm in lessons and during social times. Pupils are friendly and courteous. All pupils spoken to, and a very large majority of staff, feel that behaviour is at least good, and inspectors support these views.
- During the previous inspection, you were asked to develop the quality of teaching. Following the focus upon training, challenge and the introduction of a coaching programme, some teachers have improved their practice, others have left the school. Your high expectations of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are understood. Teaching has also improved via a curriculum review. There is now more time to deliver courses and pupils are studying subjects in greater depth. As a result, pupils are making better progress. However, there is a small number of option subjects where achievement is not yet consistently strong.
- Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of standards is effective. Leaders, including governors, are aspirational, ambitious and quietly relentless. Self-evaluation is overly detailed but it is honest and appropriately self-critical. The phrase, 'there is more to do' is often used by leaders and governors. You have developed a culture of a learning community working together. This creates capacity which means that change and improvement are sustainable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are clear arrangements for measuring the success of leaders' work to support disadvantaged pupils achieving higher outcomes, which improve life chances
- they decrease the persistent absence of a small number of pupils
- pupils make better progress in the small number of options subjects where achievement is not consistently strong.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the directors of the Church of England Central Education Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Griffiths
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I met with senior leaders, the school improvement partner and a group of governors. We also met formally and informally with pupils. We made short visits to lessons, including some jointly with senior leaders. We looked at work in pupils' books and talked to them about their learning. Additionally, we considered the results of electronic surveys of the views of parents and staff. School documents were evaluated, including information about pupils' progress, safeguarding information and the school improvement plan.