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Mr Peter Whelan
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Dear Mr Whelan

Short inspection of Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2018 with Peter Cole, 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Governors at the time, and your predecessor, identified a drop in pupils' achievement in 2016. However, they were swift in pinpointing the areas of weakness and so this was reversed a year later, seeing a significant rise in progress in 2017. Middle leaders were able to astutely inform senior leaders of gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills that had caused this decline and correct them so that strong practice and improved quality of teaching supported higher gains in pupils' outcomes.

Since your arrival at the school and the restructure of the governing body in September 2017, this focus has not been lost. In fact, it has further strengthened so that leaders at all levels are able to identify and target underperformance swiftly and tackle any issues raised. You have made sure that middle leaders are more accountable in their roles, as well as more driven to achieve even higher success. This has been achieved through increased ownership of their areas of responsibility and their ability to adapt quickly when necessary.

The school now takes in more pupils from both a wider demographic and catchment area within Leeds. Some pupils, for example, travel for over an hour to reach school. You are adapting the curriculum offered to meet the changing needs of pupils well. However, some curriculum changes have not been shared with governors and so they are not fully clear what the school is doing or why.

Published results for the school in 2017 showed a large increase in the rates of pupils' progress due to the actions of your middle leaders and teachers. In some subjects, outcomes were very high. This was due to strengths in the quality of teaching, particularly in geography, history and religious education. As a result of an identified need from the last inspection, middle leaders across all subjects have developed their curriculum so that it gives distinct opportunities to support the development of pupils' numeracy skills. The core subjects of English, mathematics and science are also showing strong gains in the rates of progress pupils make overall and across all year groups. However, your leaders have rightly spotted a need to remain focused on improving pupils' achievement even further, particularly in mathematics for lower-ability pupils and disadvantaged boys in key stage 3.

Your self-evaluation of the school is succinct and clear, and identifies key areas for further improvement. Although you, your governors and your middle leaders know the groups of pupils who require further support to increase their progress, particularly in mathematics, this is not clearly identified within your self-evaluation. Some of the current leadership is relatively new, with you, your deputy headteacher, leaders of the core subject areas of mathematics and science appointed to posts in September 2017. The governing body has also been restructured. Despite this, you have secured dedicated support from governors and given strong leadership and support to your middle leaders. As a result, they know their roles well and, during this period of change, have successfully maintained pupils' good progress. Standards continue to rise.

Pupils are mainly positive about their school and the support it gives them in their learning across all subjects and pastorally. They are keen to attend and enjoy school. They recognise the importance you and your team place on high standards, particularly in dress and behaviour code, although a few feel that, at times, too much importance is placed on the strictness of uniform. Scrutiny of some pupils' books during the inspection demonstrated that the clear majority take pride in their work, make strong progress and reflect on their learning so that they understand key concepts well. Pupils also show that they respond well to further challenges offered by their teachers so that their learning improves even further.

The local authority and diocese have offered dedicated support to you and your teams to help identify areas for further development. They recognise the positive changes you have brought to the school in the brief time you have been there, and are helping you to further strengthen the leadership of the school. Governors are linked closely to departments so that they can offer challenge and support where needed, and they know their roles well.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team maintains detailed and secure records of checks on staff and the behaviour of its pupils, including incidents of racism. They have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Any issues raised are swiftly passed to relative agencies, including the local authority and police, where necessary. Most parents and carers from the small number who responded to the online surveys

agree that their children are safe and feel safe, and that the school looks after them well. A large number of pupils, 280, took part in Ofsted's online questionnaire and the results indicate that most enjoy being at school. Exclusions are low compared with the national average and, despite a rise in 2016, they currently remain low.

A significant minority of pupils, both from the online questionnaire and from my own and my colleague's interviews with them, said that they did not always feel listened to or valued and that some teachers are not good at tackling bullying. The school's own surveys have not allowed your teams to clearly identify this belief among some of your pupils. Governors acknowledge that they need to work more diligently on understanding the views of pupils and to deliver actions that show that they are being listened to. Scrutiny of school records during the inspection show that your behaviour team deals with all incidents of bullying it is aware of. Pupils accept that such incidents are rare. Substantial support is given to the very few pupils who have some difficulties accepting the school's rules for behaviours.

Inspection findings

- You have a team of senior and middle leaders who know their roles well. You have ensured that they are able to take ownership and be accountable for their areas of responsibility. This is leading to further development of the curriculum which is, itself, helping to further support pupils' progress.
- Middle leaders have clearly identified areas where interventions are needed to close any gaps in pupils' learning and progress, particularly in mathematics for lower-ability and disadvantaged boys in key stage 3. While an in-school gap does remain in mathematics for these groups, the mathematics team is working well at supporting progress that is more rapid. A continued focus on this is needed, however.
- A significant minority of pupils do not feel as though they are valued or listened to, and they perceive some teachers as not tackling any rare bullying that does happen effectively enough so that it stops. The school does take swift action on any bullying that does occur, and it has clear and expansive records demonstrating that this is the case. Internal surveys carried out by the school have not enabled leaders to fully understand some pupils' views, or ensured that all pupils feel that the school has responded to their concerns. Making sure that pupils feel listened to, valued and part of school life is an important next step for school improvement.
- The strong leadership at all levels is apparent and leaders are able to take swift action where necessary. The significant increase in progress last year demonstrates that middle leaders and governors have been able to quickly tackle underperformance. Inspection evidence shows that standards and challenge remain high and continue to lead to strong progress for current pupils. However, a few governors are not able to describe the changes that school senior and middle leaders are making to the curriculum to broaden its appeal to all pupils as the demographics of the school's intake changes.
- The rise in absence and exclusions seen in 2016 was reversed in 2017. Current data show that they are both below the national average figures in 2017 overall.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils have both seen a marked increase in their attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils feel listened to and any valid concerns they raise are dealt with so that they feel valued and part of school life
- middle leaders, supported by senior leaders and governors, maintain their focus on the progress that groups of pupils make, particularly lower-ability pupils and disadvantaged boys in key stage 3 in mathematics
- curriculum developments are shared with all stakeholders so they can describe and understand what it is the school is doing and why.

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

Yours sincerely

Colin Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I held meetings with groups of middle and senior leaders, as well as meeting with representatives of the governing body, the local authority and the diocese. We also held meetings with groups of pupils in Years 7 and 10, as well as speaking to pupils more informally through breaktime and lunchtime in the yard. We carried out learning walks through a number of subject areas, particularly mathematics, English and history, to ascertain the level of challenge pupils receive in their lessons and their participation and engagement in them. As part of the inspection process I reviewed the responses to Ofsted online questionnaires for pupils, staff and parents. We also looked at books and scrutinised the school's own progress data alongside the published data from the government website. As part of my preparation, I also researched the school's social media presence, its own website and some local news media sites for any information relevant to the inspection process.