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5 June 2018

Mr Clive Wright
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Dear Mr Wright

Short inspection of Saint Martin's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 17 May 2018 with Tim Croft, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

Prior to the last inspection, the school expanded to accommodate pupils across the 11 to 16 age range. Pupils took GCSE examinations for the first time at the school in 2016. The school formed a multi-academy trust with a local Catholic primary feeder school in 2016. The school has a number of distinctive features, which include the Catholic ethos, the knowledge-based curriculum and the style of teaching described as 'direct instruction'. Pupils behave maturely and are keen to learn. They are confident and welcoming to visitors and keen to talk positively about their school. Pupils welcome the school's very high expectations of them and the level of challenge that they experience in their lessons. Pupils feel safe in school and understand the risks to their safety in modern society.

The previous inspection report highlighted the need for middle leaders to undertake a greater role in leading improvements in their departments. Middle leaders now evaluate the quality of education in their departments routinely and discuss the areas to improve with senior leaders regularly each year.

Since the previous inspection, the work of governors has started to improve. They

now use information about the school to evaluate the quality of education provided and to hold senior leaders more closely to account for ensuring that relative weaknesses are addressed.

Behaviour seen in lessons was impeccable. Pupils are clear that poor behaviour is not tolerated in the school and that it is rare. Pupils feel well supported in taking the next steps in their education.

You and other leaders have developed a strong ethos in the school, based around the curriculum. Pupils are taught well and they enjoy learning. They make rapid progress. They are presented with challenging texts and demonstrate sophisticated use of language and vocabulary. There is a strong focus on the acquisition of knowledge and this is reflected in the direct instruction which pupils receive from their teachers. Pupils routinely receive feedback on their work and they regularly demonstrate improvements in their understanding and skills in response to their teachers' comments. In lessons, teachers question pupils as they deliver new information to develop pupils' ideas and test their understanding. This is done more effectively by some teachers than others. Pupils listen attentively and use the printed booklets with which they are provided to highlight and record important information.

Pupils are given homework tasks which involve memorising facts and these are tested regularly in school. Where pupils' recall of facts is not yet secure, teachers do not always address this adequately. As a result, a small minority of pupils, including some who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, fall behind. However, some of the most significant examples of pupils making exceptional progress were seen in books of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.

Senior leaders know the school well and make accurate evaluations of the quality of teaching. The regular visits to lessons by senior leaders and coaching of teachers have enabled you to ensure consistent approaches to teaching and classroom routines. Leaders' analysis of pupils' performance in public exams, and of current pupils' progress, is detailed. The reliability of current pupils' progress data is not yet accurate enough, and this has slowed the rate of improvement in areas where performance is relatively weaker. Some teachers' predictions of examination outcomes have proved to be too generous. This has masked underachievement of individuals and across particular subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is led effectively. Staff are well trained and detailed records are kept of this. Staff understand their responsibilities for the safeguarding of pupils and the school's record of recruitment checks is detailed and well maintained. Staff are clear about the procedures to follow when they have concerns about a pupil.

Pupils said that they feel safe and that they are confident staff deal effectively with anything which compromises their safety and well-being. Pupils are taught about substance abuse and the risks of radicalisation. Staff have received training in these

areas, enabling the school to adopt more proactive approaches to risks to pupils' safety and well-being.

Governors are clear about their responsibility in holding leaders to account for safeguarding, and are ensuring that all governors are trained in safer recruitment. Governors understand the need to ensure that a more regular and systematic review of safeguarding arrangements is carried out.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, the progress that pupils make was evaluated, with a particular focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' actions to improve the attendance of pupils who do not attend school regularly and steps being taken to reduce the need to exclude pupils repeatedly were considered. Improvements in the work of governors and their effectiveness in ensuring that the school continues to develop were discussed.
- Pupils make significantly more progress on average than pupils in other schools. The school was ranked in the top 20% of schools nationally in 2016 and 2017. Progress in English and mathematics in 2016 and in 2017 was exceptionally high, and above average in some other subjects.
- The curriculum is based around high levels of challenge, acquisition of knowledge and direct instruction by teachers. There is a focus on pupils memorising information in order that they may develop understanding from a broad base of knowledge. There is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' vocabulary, and pupils' use of language is highly developed.
- Where there are relative weaknesses in the quality of teaching, actions are in place to address them. Progress in some weaker areas is slower than desirable and leaders recognise the need to ensure that improvements are rapid enough.
- Leaders track pupils' progress regularly and the analysis of data is detailed. There are strategies in place in some subject areas to ensure that progress information is accurate. These are not yet in place consistently across the school and leaders understand the importance of developing this aspect of their practice.
- Attendance is above the national average. There is a smaller proportion of pupils who are persistently absent than in other schools. Leaders have recently improved their strategies to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. There are now more systematic approaches to monitoring pupils' attendance, and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved as a result. While leaders are working successfully to improve the attendance of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities, the attendance of these pupils has yet to improve overall.
- The vast majority of pupils behave exceptionally well and are attentive in lessons. They show respect for one another and for adults. They are confident, articulate and their attitudes to learning are very positive. They appreciate the advice they are given to plan the next steps in their education, and they value the high level of challenge that they experience in the curriculum.
- Rates of exclusion are low compared with other schools, and the proportion of pupils subject to repeated exclusions is very low. The recent increase in

expectations of behaviour has resulted in an increase in fixed-term exclusions. The proportions of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities, and of disadvantaged pupils who are excluded, are higher than for other pupils, although the proportion of these pupils who are excluded is low overall. Leaders make effective use of the local behaviour partnership to provide alternative opportunities for pupils who require a fresh start. Leaders are developing strategies to reduce the need for repeated sanctions to ensure that even higher standards of behaviour are achieved.

- Governors are led effectively by a recently appointed chair of the governing body. The pace of improvement in governance has increased rapidly since his appointment. Prior to this, the rate of improvement was too slow and there was little improvement since the previous inspection. There is now a clear vision for effective governance being implemented to ensure that leaders are appropriately challenged and supported in developing the school further. More consistent scrutiny of the school's work has begun. For example, governors now carry out visits to lessons to gain first-hand knowledge of the school's provision. Information provided to governors by leaders is more detailed than previously, although some documentation lacks precision and clarity, which results in less effective governance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work together to embed recent improvements in governance. Documents about the performance and development of the school should be made clearer to enable governors to evaluate the school's progress more precisely
- current pupils' progress data is consistently reliable in order that it may be used to identify and address any underachievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Colling
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and senior leaders and other staff. Further discussions were held with representatives of the governing body and the school's improvement

partner. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and informally with others around the site at breaktimes and in lessons. Jointly, with school leaders, inspectors observed learning in a variety of subjects and looked at the work in pupils' books. A range of documentation was considered, including the school development plan, evidence of subject leaders' self-evaluation, data relating to current pupils' progress and the school's own analysis of previous years' examination outcomes. Records of monitoring of teaching, attendance and behaviour logs and minutes of the governing body meetings were examined. Inspectors took into account the 47 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 29 responses to the staff survey and 81 responses to the pupils' survey.