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Mr Clive Mathew
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mathew

Short inspection of The John Henry Newman Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 2018 with Jane Crow and Anne Pepper, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and your leaders have a clear vision for the school and are successfully driving the school forward. While your results in 2016 showed that, overall, pupils' progress was broadly in line with national figures, there were marked improvements last year. In 2017, pupils made progress that was significantly above national figures overall, and specifically in the English and EBacc qualifications. You have restructured your leadership team and increased your focus on teaching, learning and assessment. Subject leaders are line managed more closely, and termly 'raising standards' meetings ensure that leaders at all levels now take greater responsibility for the progress that all groups of pupils make. While you and your senior leaders accurately identify some of the improvements made in your self-evaluation, some of your overall judgements on the school's effectiveness are too generous.

We were immediately struck by the many smiling faces of pupils, who enjoy coming to school. When speaking to them, pupils universally highlighted how their teachers 'go above and beyond' to help them achieve well. Pupils display a real pride in their school. They talk enthusiastically about their strong relationships with staff and the sense of community where 'everyone goes out of their way to be friendly and make you feel welcome'. In lessons, the vast majority of pupils display good behaviour and positive attitudes. They are attentive, enthusiastic and keen to do well. We noted teachers using questioning skilfully to check pupils understand the work and to push them to think harder. Where teachers make full use of pupils' previous

achievements, activities are suitably challenging and pupils make at least good progress over time. This is not fully established across all subjects. We found that, at times, some lower-ability pupils are not always given the support they need to ensure that they are able to get on with their work promptly.

In our discussions, governors portrayed a more accurate view of the school's overall effectiveness. They are right when they say that this is a good school that is improving. They feel most proud of the culture in which staff are developed, and the outward-looking nature of the school promotes the sharing of best practice in its search for continual improvement. The close links with families and the wider community help pupils expand upon their Christian experience within school. They demonstrate fundamental British values, including tolerance and respect beyond the school gates. Governors acknowledge that the challenging comments in the previous inspection report linked to the progress of disadvantaged pupils stimulated a response. They rightly view that the actions taken to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress are going in the right direction but are not the finished article yet.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. We picked up a few minor administrative issues, but these were easily rectified during the course of the inspection. Leaders are aware of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe, and these are well communicated to staff. Pupils say they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They talk particularly about the significant impact of talks from past students highlighting some of the dangers to their safety. The overwhelming majority of parents agree that their children are safe, happy and well cared for, and that staff deal with bullying well on the rare occasions it does occur. Staff unequivocally say that pupils are safe. The six designated staff for child protection have an in-depth knowledge of vulnerable pupils and have robust arrangements in place to ensure that they are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, we followed specific lines of enquiry during the inspection. These were based on the issues raised in the last inspection, the school's recent performance information and an analysis of the school's website.
- First, we looked at how leaders and governors have improved teaching and learning for pupils. The improved outcomes achieved in 2017 result from the effective actions leaders have taken, including monitoring standards of teaching and learning more closely. You acknowledge that 18 months ago some pupils did not make enough progress. Through 'raising standards' meetings, increased learning walks, and tighter line management, overall standards are now higher. Observations of pupils' work, and looking at the school's most recent assessment information, confirm that this trend of improvement is likely to continue. You have also increased department development time, and introduced key focus areas that help teachers to improve their practice across all subject areas.
- Your four strands for improving teaching and learning are linked to teachers

setting appropriate levels of challenge; learning intentions being made clear; questioning being used to check pupils' understanding and extend their learning; and adapting learning in the light of what pupils know. Regular training, including work with other schools, enables staff to learn from each other, share resources and improve their practice. We could see the impact of the first three strands during learning walks. Consequently, pupils across year groups mostly receive good-quality teaching that allows them to make good progress. However, we noted that the impact of the work in your last strand is less evident. Subject leaders confirmed that this improvement work is less developed, and you acknowledged that this remains one of your focus areas for the future.

- My second line of enquiry was about the progress of disadvantaged pupils, because, at the last inspection, leaders were tasked with ensuring that disadvantaged pupils made more progress. You and your leaders now have a greater awareness of the barriers to learning that your disadvantaged pupils face. You now have a 'pupil-premium champion' on your senior leadership team to help you track the progress of disadvantaged pupils more carefully and report back to other leaders and governors. Regular reviews and meetings between departments and learning coordinators ensure that pupils' progress is kept in line with their peers.
- Some staff are now gaining higher education qualifications linked to the provision for disadvantaged pupils. This helps you to ensure that the support in place is linked to pupils' individual need and is proven to be effective. For example, pupils now benefit from small-group work to develop their skills in English and mathematics; a summer school to help them make the move from primary school more easily; and a 'raising aspiration' programme that gives them the skills they need to make better progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils speak positively about their experiences at school. They say that they have been helped to develop their confidence and self-esteem through a range of trips and visits. They enjoy learning, and feel that they make good progress over time. The work in their books, and the school's current information on their progress from different starting points, support this view. Although it is reducing, there is still a difference between the progress that disadvantaged pupils make and that of their non-disadvantaged peers nationally, including how well they attend. However, the accelerating trend indicates that this difference is likely to diminish going forward.
- My third line of enquiry was around achievement in the sixth form. This was because, in 2016, some students made below-average progress in a few academic and vocational subjects. In 2017, pupils made significantly better progress across the curriculum. The effective sixth-form leaders monitor standards closely; they know where improvements need to be made and have clear action plans in place. Students receive sound guidance so that they enrol on the right courses, and this means more students complete the courses they start. Students are given useful advice throughout their courses, including work experience that prepares them well for when they leave. All students progressed to either education, employment or training last year.
- Students were very complimentary about the lengths their teachers go to so that

they can succeed. They are aware of their target grades, and could explain how they know they are on target. Year 13 students have received offers for higher education, many of these at their first-choice university. They value the student voice, including the 'parliament' and the senior positions that give them valuable leadership experiences. They feel proud to be part of the sixth form, and feel that the many productions and the 'Kiddies Support Scheme', including the carnival, are great ways of bringing students together while supporting international charities. The school's information on current students indicates that their positive progress is likely to continue.

- The vast majority of parents who responded by text or to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were complimentary about the school's work and would recommend the school to others. Most echoed the views of students when they said: 'Teaching staff go above and beyond, often giving up their own time after school to ensure the students understand all elements of their subjects.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- best practice is shared across departments, particularly linked to the fourth strand of your improving teaching and learning programme, so that teachers routinely adapt learning to enable more pupils to make better progress
- you continue to identify and remove disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning, including absence, so that the progress these pupils make catches up with that of their peers, and this is reflected in your published progress figures
- sixth-form leaders continue to embed improvements so that your published results show students make at least good progress across all subject areas.

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

Yours sincerely

John Randall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and other senior and middle leaders, a group of five governors and three sets of pupils from different age groups. We observed a range of lessons jointly with senior leaders to see pupils at work, and checked pupils' books to evaluate their progress over time. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation and development planning, safeguarding, including the single central record, and attendance and behaviour records. We also took

account of the 529 pupil responses, the 44 staff responses and the 244 parent responses, including 222 by text to Ofsted's online surveys.