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Mr Joe Richardson
Headteacher
Cardinal Newman Catholic School A Specialist Science College
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Dear Mr Richardson

Short inspection of Cardinal Newman Catholic School A Specialist Science College

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 2018 with John Constable, Ofsted Inspector and Paul Lerner, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide strong and passionate leadership that places the well-being of your pupils at the very heart of everything you do. Pupils enjoy school and say that school is a good place to be. They develop good relationships with their teachers and feel confident that they will be listened to and supported when they need it. Pupils report that there is very little bullying, that the school is a place where differences are celebrated and where 'you can feel safe in your own skin'. Consequently, pupils behave well around school, showing respect for each other and for adults.

The school is well regarded by parents and carers, is regularly oversubscribed and has increased the number of pupils on its roll. In 2015, Cardinal Newman Catholic School joined with two of your key feeder primary schools to create the St Alban Catholic Academies Trust (SACAT). One of the benefits of this has been to develop a better understanding among teachers of what pupils can do by the end of key stage 2. This has resulted in a more effective transition for pupils between the end of the primary phase and the beginning of their key stage 3 studies.

You and your governing body have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and your plans set out clearly how leaders will drive improvements.

You have successfully tackled the areas identified for improvement in the inspection report from your predecessor school. Teaching over time is effective and pupils make good progress across key stage 3 and key stage 4, especially in English, science, religious education, history and geography. This progress has placed the school significantly above the national average for the past two years. Attainment at key stage 4 is broadly in line with the national average. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities do well because their individual needs are well understood by both class teachers and teaching assistants. This means that tasks are made accessible to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities while still providing challenge.

Pupils are keen to do well and the vast majority strive to meet the high expectations that staff have of them. Only occasionally, in lessons where activities do not interest them, do some pupils lose focus on their learning. For pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour, you have successful strategies that support them in being able to make the most of their time at school.

Students very much enjoy their time in the sixth form; they choose the school for its sense of community and the high level of individual support available, both in class and through mentor programmes. They speak highly of their teachers' subject knowledge and commitment, both of which were evident in classrooms visited during the inspection. Students have a strong record of success at obtaining both university places and apprenticeships and feel well prepared for this next stage of their education or training.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and school leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff and these records are regularly scrutinised by your safeguarding governor. Staff are well trained and know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk. Ensuring that pupils are safe is part of the school's culture. This includes pupils who are educated off-site in alternative provision. Safeguarding records are kept well and any child protection referrals are followed up and monitored closely.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe through assemblies and during personal, social, health and economic education lessons. Topics covered include how to keep safe online, the consequences of drug use, extremism and body image. You also respond quickly to specific concerns that may arise among the pupils. For example, you have brought in external speakers to share their experiences of knife crime and ensured that pupils have the opportunity to explore issues in an informed and sensitive way.

Inspection findings

- In recent years, school leaders have thought carefully about how to provide the kind of curriculum that will best serve the pupils. There is a clear emphasis on ensuring that courses allow pupils to develop their knowledge and skills through key stage 3 and GCSEs in readiness for post-16 study. For example, a business and finance course, that links directly to post-16 study, has recently been introduced at key stage 4.
- After a barren few years when the proportion of pupils taking a language at GCSE has been well below the national average, interest among pupils at key stage 3 is now rising. This is because you have taken effective action to improve the leadership and quality of teaching in languages. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the numbers of pupils choosing to study French at GCSE, which means that A-level French will be reintroduced in the near future.
- You believe fervently that pupils should make choices to study subjects that interest and excite them, regardless of their ability. This has caused some challenges for you because of the greater academic rigour of the new GCSE courses. The actions you have taken so far have successfully supported lower-ability pupils to complete courses in some of the more academic subjects. However, you are aware that you need to continue to review courses and explore alternatives to a traditional academic curriculum so that the needs of all groups of pupils are met effectively.
- All pupils study religious education to GCSE level. Pupils value these lessons and outcomes at GCSE have been above the national average for the past two years. These lessons contribute to the strong personal, social, cultural and economic education curriculum that encourages pupils to develop their own set of morals and an understanding of modern British values. Such an approach helps pupils make their way in the world beyond school.
- By the end of key stage 4, pupils have made more progress from their starting points than pupils at most other schools nationally. Disadvantaged pupils also make good progress and the differences in progress and attainment between them and other pupils are diminishing rapidly, particularly in key stage 3. This good progress results from a clear identification of the barriers that interrupt pupils' learning and an effective range of strategies used to overcome them.
- However, in 2017, a dip in the mathematics GCSE results had a significant impact on outcomes for a number of pupils, many of whom were disadvantaged pupils. In 2016, progress in mathematics had been above average for all pupils and so leaders were quick to review the factors that led to the more disappointing results. Actions, such as more detailed evaluation of assessment information for each individual pupil, mean that decisions about which tier pupils will be entered for are now based on stronger evidence than was the case in 2017.
- There was also disappointment in outcomes for students in some A-level subjects in 2017. Following this, senior leaders now meet regularly with subject leads to ensure that information on how well students are doing is accurate. You had already identified that the most able students were not making as much progress during their A levels as students of middle ability and have taken steps to address

this. There is evidence in students' work, and in some lessons visited during the inspection, that the most able students are beginning to be challenged more so that they reach their full potential.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum at both key stage 4 and key stage 5 continues to be reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils
- teachers provide suitable challenge so that students in key stage 5, especially the most able students, make the same good progress that they do in key stage 4.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we visited classes to talk to pupils, observe teaching, learning and the behaviour of pupils and to examine the work in books. A range of school documents, including safeguarding records, the school improvement plan, assessment information and the school self-evaluation were scrutinised. Meetings were held with you, other senior leaders including the member of staff responsible for safeguarding, and subject leaders, as well as governors and groups of pupils. The responses of the 51 parents, 92 members of staff and 127 pupils who responded to the Ofsted questionnaires were also taken into account.