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Mr Andrew Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Saint Aidan's Church of England High School

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 2018 with Phil Hyman, 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 October 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 and other leaders, including governors, know the school well. Your aspirations for pupils are high. You expect staff to match these, and typically they do. This has enabled you to build upon the school's strengths and put right the areas for improvement noted at the last inspection. You and other leaders have created, and sustained, a positive and caring community. Teachers and other staff say that they are proud to work at the school, and pupils say they are valued and well cared for. As a result, the school is highly regarded in the community and is a popular choice with parents and carers when deciding upon their children's secondary education. Parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, routinely expressed positive views of the impact that you and other staff have upon pupils' progress and well-being. One comment, which summed up the views of many, was, 'St Aidan's is a fantastic school... my son has thrived since joining.'

Pupils' conduct and attitudes to learning are strengths of the school. Pupils understand how to learn well, and routinely do so. As a result, the progress they make across a broad range of subjects is good. Pupils enjoy school and most attend regularly. Pupils' attendance overall is higher than others nationally. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with one another and staff. Bullying is rare. On the few occasions bullying occurs, it is resolved swiftly and effectively.

You and other senior leaders demonstrate the capacity to further improve the standard of education provided at the school. For example, the actions that you have taken to improve the attendance, engagement and next steps in education and employment for disadvantaged pupils have been successful. They are improving disadvantaged pupils' progress and have a positive impact on the life chances of these pupils.

Pupils' outcomes are good, across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils from all starting points, including the most able, generally make the progress that they should, because the work they are set matches their academic needs. In 2017, examination results showed that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities typically made less progress than others. Boys' progress in English and a small number of other subjects did not match that of girls. You and other leaders have taken immediate and precise action to reduce these differences. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrated that these actions are effective because the differences are diminishing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff agree that pupils' safety is secure. Staff are routinely updated about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies. For example, recently, this has included training to protect pupils from the risks of extremism. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet, and they are further protected by the internet filtering system used by the school.

Safeguarding records are detailed and are well maintained. Leaders act swiftly and effectively when required. Inspectors checked referrals and found that they are followed up and recorded effectively. Leaders' checking to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils who are absent from school is robust and effective, including any who may have poor attendance. Inspectors found that leaders manage effectively the safety of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Inspection findings

- The first area that we considered was whether school leaders, including governors, ensure that the pupil premium funding is managed effectively. We found that it is. You, and other leaders with specific responsibility for this funding, know pupils very well. You have a clear understanding of the educational barriers each pupil faces. As a result, the actions that you take are precise, and are strengthening these pupils' academic progress. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is good; it matches that of pupils nationally. Similarly, the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils has reduced, to a level which matches pupils nationally. The numbers of disadvantaged pupils who receive fixed-term exclusions from school is low and reducing.
- Disadvantaged pupils' academic and career aspirations are consistently positive.

These pupils' careers education is a strength of the curriculum that they receive. Parents support their children effectively, for example by routinely attending consultation evenings, where pupils' progress and next steps are discussed. As a result, almost all disadvantaged pupils move on to appropriate next steps in education and training. Those with high starting points are supported effectively to pursue academic and university pathways.

- Disadvantaged pupils receive a good standard of education, because of your effective management of the pupil premium funding. This has secured their positive attitudes to learning and good attendance. Disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved. The progress these pupils make matches that of others more regularly than previously, although variation remains.
- Our second focus area was to investigate whether you and other school leaders ensure that boys learn effectively across a broad range of subjects, including English. In 2017, boys' examination outcomes were weaker than those of girls. Boys were also far more likely to be excluded from school than girls. We found that currently pupils' conduct, including that of boys, is good. Fewer pupils are excluded than the national average, and the number of school exclusions is reducing. The proportion of those excluded who are boys is also reducing. The boys with whom inspectors spoke said that they enjoy and engage in their school life and education.
- Boys' current work supports your assessment information, which shows boys' stronger progress than was the case previously, across a range of subjects. Teachers generally set high expectations for boys, which they respond to positively. In these cases, boys engage in learning and make the progress they should. Boys thrive when they are provided with opportunities to share their knowledge and views, which they do articulately and confidently, across a range of subjects. Boys typically present their work with care and pride, including in English and mathematics. Pupils' work demonstrated that these strengths seem secure and, as a result, boys' progress is catching up with the progress of others nationally. However, girls' progress in school continues to strengthen, so boys' progress does not match that of girls in a number of areas, including in English.
- The final area that we considered was whether you and other school leaders provided effective training opportunities for teachers, enabling them to challenge and support pupils' learning effectively. We had a particular focus on the progress that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make.
- We found, overall, that staff are provided with effective training opportunities. Leaders have a clear knowledge of teachers' strengths and areas for development, which enables them to provide personalised and precise training. This has secured consistency in the quality of teaching. Teachers who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said that they value the training provided and that it improves the quality of teaching that they provide.
- You set aspirational academic targets for pupils, which support teachers to provide pupils with work that challenges them. The work seen by inspectors shows the most able pupils are typically provided with activities that expect them to think and respond with depth and detail. Pupils with low starting points tend to make strong progress, often because of the effective actions of leaders and

teachers to strengthen their literacy. Support plans for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are typically reviewed and refined effectively, with a sharper focus on pupils' academic progress and next steps in education and training than was the case previously. As a result, these pupils generally attain the qualifications required to move them on to next steps in education and training. However, despite a better picture overall, variability remains in the teaching of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Therefore, these pupils' current progress varies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- boys' progress continues to improve so that it matches that of girls, including in English
- teachers consistently ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress
- disadvantaged pupils' progress continues to improve, so that it routinely matches other pupils nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you and your school leaders and members of the governing body. Discussions took place with representatives of the Diocese of Blackburn and the local authority. Inspectors met with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views on a variety of issues including safeguarding, well-being and teaching. We examined a range of the school's documentation such as self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information, attendance and behaviour records, special educational needs and/or disability plans, and safeguarding information. We considered 182 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire, Parent View, 57 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility, 164 responses to the Ofsted online pupils' questionnaire, and 61 responses to the Ofsted online staff questionnaire. We conducted learning walks, including some with senior leaders, across a range of subjects and year groups. We scrutinised the work in a sample of pupils' books by undertaking a work analysis together with school leaders.