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29 November 2018

Mr Ian Wilson
Headteacher
The Bishops' Blue Coat Church of England High School
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Dear Mr Wilson

Short inspection of The Bishops' Blue Coat Church of England High School

Following my visit to the school on 20 November 2018 with Craig Yates, 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 March 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your arrival to the school in January 2016, you have gathered a deep understanding of the school and community needs. You have galvanised the staff and given them a clear sense of purpose and direction. You have high expectations of all your staff and they hold you in high regard and feel valued and appreciated. Staff now have a clear and transparent understanding of what needs to be done to ensure that all pupils at the school fulfil their potential. Together with your new and improved senior team, you have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Progress and outcomes across some areas of the school are not as strong as they should be, particularly at key stage 4 and for disadvantaged pupils. Aspects of leadership and management, such as governance and the roles of middle leaders, are also not strong. I checked through your plans and strategies you have in place to bring about improvement. They are appropriate and fit for purpose. However, they have been too slow in implementation and consequently most pupils are not achieving as highly as their national peers.

Improving the quality of teaching is central to the school's work. You, other leaders and external educational professionals make annual checks on the performance of pupils and teachers within subject areas through the recently established 'Quality Assurance Audits'. The information from these audit checks enables you to pinpoint effective practice and

where further improvements are needed. These checks then inform a well-thought-out programme of training and support for teachers that focuses on individual and whole-school priorities. Teachers say that they value the recent professional development programme and recognise that collaboration opportunities have improved. However, middle leaders do not routinely and effectively check up on their staff teams to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is sustained and is having an impact on pupils' outcomes. Consequently, underperformance can go unchallenged and most pupils do not make the progress that they should.

There are a number of strengths within the school. Pupils' behaviour in class and around school is typically good. They are polite and friendly towards one another, and have positive relationships with their teachers. The school ethos is summarised by 'Known, Nurtured, Inspired.' These values are at the heart of decision-making of all leaders and staff across the school. Staff know their pupils well and are proud to work at the school. They care deeply about pupils. There were several positive comments on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for example: 'We feel that the strapline of 'Known, Nurtured and Inspired' is well chosen and there is strong evidence that the school delivers on all three points. There are opportunities to take responsibility, to develop leadership skills and to be ambassadors all of which are empowering and help to broaden my child's horizons.'

While the school has a number of strengths, there are also some key aspects that are in need of improvement. The previous inspection areas for improvement have not all been addressed successfully. Teaching and learning is not of consistent high quality across the school to ensure that pupils make the progress they should from their starting points. However, you have overseen a comprehensive overhaul of pupils' behaviour and staff expectations through the launch of 'BEST', Bishops' Expected Standards. Consequently, pupils' attitudes to learning are improving and they are beginning to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders and governors place a strong emphasis on the importance of safeguarding and fulfil their statutory duties with care and attention. A caring and professional approach contributes strongly to the positive ethos in the school. You have recently updated your safeguarding policy and the new policy is thorough and robust. Staff receive regular training on a range of relevant safeguarding issues and they are alert and vigilant and knowledgeable of risk factors. Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously and meet regularly with leaders in school to check upon school actions.

The school works well with other agencies to support the well-being of pupils, to improve attendance and to keep vulnerable pupils safe. Pupils with whom we spoke, including those who are disadvantaged or have additional needs, raised few concerns about bullying. They told us that bullying does occur on occasion, but when it is reported, it is dealt with swiftly by staff.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, with many linked to the decline in pupils' performance against their national peers. A large focus for inspectors was the significant underperformance of disadvantaged pupils over a sustained period of time within the school. Leaders and governors have not ensured that strategies undertaken in the past years have secured enough impact on pupils' outcomes. However, a recent overhaul of school strategy has taken place and leaders have now sharply focused on next steps for improving these outcomes.
- Leaders across the school are focused on improving attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils. Investment in additional pastoral support staff and changes to the school pastoral systems are already showing some improvement and having a positive impact this academic year. However, while whole-school attendance is similar to the national average, many of the initiatives to improve disadvantaged pupils' attendance are relatively new. Therefore, the impact of these improvements has not yet been seen to its fullest effect.
- Published data and the school's own current assessment information show that outcomes for pupils are beginning to improve, particularly at key stage 3. However, there are still variations in pupils' outcomes across subject areas. This is because inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school still remain. Eliminating these inconsistencies is a key priority for leaders. You have taken steps to do this through the development of school systems and also through the creation of teaching and learning forums and communities. These provide a platform for staff to collaborate and share their best practice. Staff reported to inspectors that because pupils' behaviour had improved, staff were now much more confident to try different approaches in their teaching that would help pupils learn more effectively. You also use the expertise of specialist leaders of education to support your improvement work in teaching and learning. Inspectors found that art and drama are a particular strength of the school, with many impressive performances and displays around school, where pupils' work is proudly displayed.
- Pupils benefit from a well-organised, broad and balanced curriculum. You have ensured that the curriculum is constantly evaluated and tailored to match the aspirations, abilities and interests of all pupils. The school actively encourages all pupils to undertake religious education to GCSE level. 'Extended Curriculum Days' are used well to promote pupils' personal development. During these days, the traditional timetable stops and pupils are involved in a range of well-organised activities such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) events, as well as careers and enterprise events. These extended curriculum days help to fine tune pupils' skills and also provide further enrichment outside the classroom.
- Governors are honest in recognising where the school could be even better. They share in the constant desire to improve in order to serve the pupils and the local community. However, governors have not been vociferous enough in checking that leaders' strategies for improving the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils have had a positive impact.
- The small sixth form provides a safe environment in which expectations placed on learners are high. Learners are happy and they attend well. There has been a rise in

the proportion of learners gaining A-level grades A* to B and grades A* to C and the overall progress learners make has improved in 2018. Retention rates on courses are good and reflect the meticulous checks, advice and support given to learners on entry to the sixth form. The advice that learners receive in preparation for life beyond the sixth form, including university, further training or employment, is impartial and of high quality. The school's records show that very few learners are not in education, training or employment after their time in the sixth form.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning continue to improve so that pupils reach the standards of which they are capable
- leaders embed and build upon recent school improvement strategies to improve the achievement, attainment and attendance of disadvantaged pupils across the school
- leaders further embed and evaluate the impact of recent improvements to school systems, so that they have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes across the school
- middle leaders are effective in holding their teams to account by adopting a clear quality assurance process that results in improvements for pupils' outcomes.
- governors challenge and check the impact of strategies for the achievement, attainment and attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leaders, middle leaders and governors. Inspectors met formally with one group of pupils and informally with pupils at break and lunchtime. Inspectors visited lessons alongside senior leaders to see the impact of recent changes on behaviour, teaching and learning and the progress of pupils. Documentation was scrutinised including: minutes from governors' meetings, information about pupils' progress, documents about teaching and learning, the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, details of attendance and exclusions and information about safeguarding. We also discussed the school's journey of improvement with leaders across the school. Inspectors also viewed the 131 parent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 79 pupil questionnaires and 42 staff questionnaires.