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Ms Claire Madeloso
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Dear Ms Madeloso

Short inspection of Archbishop Blanch School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019 with Philip Wood, 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 May 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 be a section 5 inspection.

Leaders have developed a culture of high aspirations where pupils flourish. Since the previous inspection, the quality of education in the school has improved. For example, in 2017, Year 11 pupils' progress from starting points was above average. In 2018, pupils' progress was well above average overall and for all ability groups. Pupils' progress in English has been well above average over the last three years. Pupils also make particularly strong progress in modern foreign languages, humanities and a range of other subjects.

The school has experienced recent changes in senior leadership. In October 2018, you stepped up from your deputy headteacher role to lead the school as acting headteacher. Governors have made further changes to the senior leadership team, including promoting an experienced assistant headteacher to the role of acting deputy headteacher. The process of recruiting a substantive headteacher is underway.

You are ambitious for the pupils and are determined that they have the opportunity to develop their skills and become confident and responsible citizens in the

community. You are very well supported by a committed team of governors, leaders and staff who share your high aspirations. Staff morale is high and staff are proud to work at Archbishop Blanch School. You and your staff work closely with many feeder primary schools to ensure that Year 7 pupils hit the ground running and build on their prior learning so that no time is wasted. You are reviewing the curriculum choices for science in key stage 4, and the range of vocational subjects in the sixth form, to ensure that provision matches the needs and abilities of all pupils and students.

The school's Christian ethos lies at the heart of everything the school does. Pupils and students say that they enjoy coming to school. Overall attendance is above the national average. The school is a calm and orderly learning environment. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and behave very well both in lessons and at breaktimes. They show good manners. Pupils are polite and respectful to each other and their teachers. Relationships between pupils and staff are highly positive. Pupils are keen to learn in lessons and support one another well. They spoke positively about the wide range of extra-curricular activities. The vast majority of parents who responded to the free-text service and Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent commented, 'I am extremely pleased with the progress of my children.' Another parent said, 'Staff are caring. My child has grown in confidence.' The vast majority of parents would recommend the school to others.

Senior leaders and governors have tackled effectively the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching. This has been tackled well. Leaders have enabled less successful subject areas in the past to learn from very successful ones. For example, the subject leader for English shares good practice with other subject leaders. The school's marking and feedback policy is being applied consistently. Teachers are making better use of the information available to them to plan lessons which meet pupils' needs and challenge their thinking. Consequently, outcomes have improved over time.

Following the last inspection, senior leaders have developed an assessment and data system that leaders and staff are using effectively to check the progress of pupils. This means that they can intervene quickly and support pupils who are falling behind. Staff appreciate the training that they have received. A typical comment was: 'The analysis of data by senior leaders has really helped us to focus on how pupils are doing and developed our confidence.'

You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. You recognise that, despite improvements, more needs to be done to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make more progress in mathematics and science. You are also aware that sixth formers need to make consistently strong progress in academic courses.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe in school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. Leaders ensure that checks made on the suitability of staff to work at the school are thorough. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training, including that in the 'Prevent' duty to keep pupils safe from radicalisation. Staff know what to do if they are worried about a pupil's welfare or safety. Leaders respond to any concerns in a timely manner. They work closely with external agencies to provide support for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know how to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet. Bullying is rare, and pupils said that, when it happens, staff deal with it quickly. All staff feel that pupils are safe at the school. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry related to pupils' progress in mathematics. In 2018, pupils' progress in mathematics dipped at the end of key stage 4 to broadly average. This was partly because some pupils had been entered for the foundation-level examination, which limited their ability to achieve higher grades. The newly appointed leader for mathematics has introduced a range of strategies, such as a focus on problem-solving, which are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Current assessment information and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that progress for current pupils in mathematics across the school is improving strongly.
- Another area of focus was how well disadvantaged pupils achieve, particularly in mathematics and science. While these pupils made more progress than other pupils nationally in science and mathematics in 2017, their progress dipped in 2018. Leaders have analysed the reasons for this very carefully. You and your team understand the barriers to learning that these pupils face. Senior leaders have raised the profile of disadvantaged pupils among the staff and improved the school's data systems. While you have taken steps to check disadvantaged pupils' progress more closely and to support pupils through mentoring, their progress in mathematics and science in key stage 4 is still not as strong as in English and other subjects.
- In the sixth form, there has been a steady improvement in the progress that students make in vocational and academic subjects. Sixth formers feel very well supported by their teachers. They appreciate the careers guidance and the opportunities for work experience. The vast majority secure places in higher education, training or employment. In 2018, Year 13 students made strong progress in vocational subjects. However, they made broadly average progress in their A-level subjects. Leaders are taking action to further improve teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form. Teachers use questioning skilfully to

probe and deepen students' understanding. You, along with the leader for the sixth form, are placing a greater emphasis on checking the progress that students make from their starting points. Subject leaders have revised schemes of work in key stage 4 to ensure that sixth formers are better prepared for the demands of academic subjects at A level. Although current students are making better progress overall than students in the past, it is not consistently strong across academic subjects.

- Governors are dedicated to the ongoing improvement of the school. One governor commented, 'We want pupils and students to achieve both academic and personal excellence.' Governors offer a good balance of challenge and support. They know the school well and make a very positive contribution to the ethos of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the current work to further improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics and science in key stage 4
- sixth-form students make consistently strong rates of progress across academic subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, we met with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders and teaching staff. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair. I also met with a representative of the local authority. We carried out observations of learning and looked at pupils' and students' work. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. We spoke informally with pupils and students during breaktime and lunchtime.

We took account of 75 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 73 free-text responses. We also considered the views of 60 staff and 23 pupils. We looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, external reviews and information about pupils' progress. We also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe, records of training, safeguarding checks, and attendance and behaviour information. I also undertook a review of the school's website.