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Mrs Yvonne Connolly
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Dear Mrs Connolly

Short inspection of St Catherine's Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 8 January 2019 with Lisa Gorman, 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 on 21 October 2015.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have 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.

You, together with your senior and middle leaders, provide clear, principled leadership. You expect pupils to achieve to the best of their ability and to enjoy their learning. You continue to develop strong, coherent systems to ensure that this happens. Leaders, governors and pupils commented on the positive effect your vision has had on the school community. In response to the Ofsted staff survey, 92% of staff said they were proud to be members of the school.

You have ensured good teamwork, and middle and senior leaders work together with associate leaders, taking on teaching and learning leadership responsibilities. Leaders have introduced a new approach to teaching and learning reviews, and ensure that school planning is clear for staff. Long-term planning is sharper and more rigorous than previously. Senior leaders embrace the vision and work closely with middle leaders to ensure that pupils are stretched and challenged across the curriculum. Initiatives such as the 'flying start' booklets in science, 'cognitive load' training and the development of memory platforms support this work. Subject leaders said they feel trusted and supported, and they described the professional development programme as one of the school's strengths. Leaders said there is greater clarity about what students must do to succeed. Through their meetings,

governors hold senior leaders to account for aspects of the school's performance, including the use of pupil premium, exclusions data, student achievement and special educational needs funding.

You and your team promote high expectations for pupils, and they, in turn, embrace the opportunities for extending their learning. Pupils' outcomes and progress are impressive. Pupils confirmed that they are always encouraged to attempt the extension work and to think more deeply about their learning. Leaders' insight into the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is incisive. This was confirmed in discussions with leaders who accompanied us on our visits to lessons. You provide a broad and rich curriculum, which includes a focus on creativity and exciting extra-curricular activities. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are very strong; funds are well spent on small class sizes for these pupils, and staff prioritise pupils' needs through the use of pupil premium champions, for example.

The responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, were overwhelmingly positive. Pupils like coming to school, and attendance rates are well above the national average. Pupils are full of praise for their teachers, and especially value the care that they show. 82% of pupils who responded to the survey said they would recommend this school to others.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is particularly effective. The single central record is well maintained and compliant. Your staff know their pupils well, and keep a systematic watching brief on vulnerable youngsters, engaging fully in multi-agency working. Timely and relevant training is provided for all staff on issues such as the 'Prevent' duty. Pupils are confident about self-referring for help. Pupils said that the 'Every Child Matters' days are a powerful source of support, and teach them about all aspects of personal safety. In this way, they are able to explore and value differences. They know who to report their concerns to, and are especially trustful of the peer mentors and chaplain.

Students feel safe and are confident to articulate even uncomfortable feelings, as observed in one lesson where pupils chose to communicate some of their fears. Pupils know how to link learning across subjects, such as drama, to the school's focus on developing pupils' self-esteem. They are keen to celebrate differences, including in relation to sexuality. Your case studies of vulnerable pupils show that you have addressed issues sensitively, such as eating disorders and low self-worth.

Inspection findings

During the inspection, we agreed to focus on aspects of the school's curriculum, specifically how it is delivered and its impact on pupils' learning. We considered how successfully you are improving outcomes for the most able pupils, how you are using evidence to inform strategic planning, and how systems and policies are being implemented.

- Our first line of enquiry was to check whether pupils, particularly the most able,

are being challenged and particularly in mathematics. This was partly because some historical data indicated that pupils whose key stage 2 attainment was high do not progress as well as others, and that outcomes in mathematics are not as strong as in other curriculum areas. In addition, the previous inspection report identified the need to ensure that all teaching at key stage 3 was sufficiently challenging for all groups of pupils.

- We found that pupils' current performance data across year groups indicates progress is strengthening, and especially so for the most able pupils.
- Our visits to lessons and observations of pupils' work in a range of subjects showed that most-able pupils are being stretched to do their best. When we examined pupils' books, we saw that challenging work is set, and that responses to teachers' feedback are enabling pupils to improve their work further. This was reinforced during our discussions with leaders and pupils.
- Girls told us they have embraced the challenge to achieve the highest GCSE grades, which is a recurrent theme in their lessons. Year 10 and 11 pupils said that extension work is available in all lessons, and particularly in mathematics. Mathematics lessons focus on problem-solving, and we saw that pupils benefit from the class discussions which follow on from their independent work. This enables them to share insights into their thinking with their peers and to articulate their mathematical reasoning.
- Teachers use questioning extremely effectively, and they encourage pupils to share understanding of the ways they think about subject content. Pupils actively reflect on the process of their learning in different subjects and we saw this in their books. Middle and senior leaders said that teachers' professional development focuses on the theme of 'thinking hard'. They explained that teachers use modelling, visualisers and tracking systems to maximise challenge for pupils of all abilities. Your school development plans corroborate these aims. Teachers identify pupils' common misconceptions and act to ensure that pupils are corrected. For example, one teacher consistently revisited the concept of percentages when pupils misunderstood the concept of a multiplier.
- Discussions and shared observations of learning showed that leaders' insight into the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is accurate. Staff consistently implement teaching, learning and assessment policies, so that progress is evident in pupils' work. Pupils are not always able to articulate where individual aspects of their teachers' feedback fit in to their overall learning. This slows down their ability to make more progress.
- The second line of enquiry was to explore whether leaders' medium- and long-term planning is adequately informed by evidence from evaluation of actions taken, and particularly of their impact.
- Senior and middle leaders have a good understanding of school priorities in relation to their roles and responsibilities. They constantly revisit their evaluation of the impact of their actions to refine their planning and amend interventions. In terms of the curriculum, leaders use their detailed subject knowledge to identify any gaps in teaching and learning so that they can plan for additional approaches.

- Evidence and performance information are used to inform pastoral policies and interventions.
- Our third line of enquiry was to investigate the extent to which pupils' learning behaviours reflect the school's ambitions and policies. You and your team have prioritised improving pupils' behaviour over the past year, and you were keen to explore with us whether this has had a positive impact.
- The girls we spoke to clearly understand the revised behaviour policy, and believe it is applied consistently. Staff use the behaviour tracking system to help identify particular trends and patterns among pupils and year groups.
- Pupils' attendance rates are well above the national average, and no group of pupils is disadvantaged by low attendance. Pupils behave courteously and considerately, and show respect for adults and for one another. Students are keen to learn and are proud of their school. They report that any rare incidents of prejudicial behaviour or bullying are always followed up promptly, and sanctions are applied.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is thoughtfully developed across the curriculum. It is well linked in to the school's ethos, and helps underpin the high standards of behaviour.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to develop the use of information for planning and intervention, particularly in relation to pupils' personal development, behaviour, attendance and welfare
- ensure that all pupils know how well they are doing, and what they need to do to make further progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Hudson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We looked at a wide range of school documentation, including self-evaluation, development plans, assessment information, behaviour logs, attendance and exclusions data, and documents relating to safeguarding. We visited 12 lessons and an assembly, accompanied by senior leaders. We looked at pupils' work and met with groups of key stage 3 and 4 pupils, including pupils with differing prior attainment, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs. We spoke to pupils in buildings and in the playground at social times and in lessons.

We met with middle and senior leaders, the designated safeguarding lead, attendance officer, pupil premium lead and the chair of governors. We also took account of 50 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire, 67 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey, and 46 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.