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Mr Philip Denton
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Dear Mr Denton

Short inspection of St Bede's Catholic High School

Following my visit to the school on 8 May 2019 with Ofsted Inspector David Woodhouse, 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 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.

The school has increased its admission number since the previous inspection. It is oversubscribed. You were appointed as headteacher at the start of this school year, having previously been head of school, working with the last headteacher. The school has also appointed a new deputy headteacher. He has also been in that post from the start of this school year. You have clarified other senior leaders' roles. In addition, you have extended the roles of some middle leaders to give them responsibility for aspects of school life across the school. With these changes, leaders have been able to build on the school's previous successes and find ways to improve further. The school runs very smoothly from day to day.

The school's ethos of care of and commitment to each pupil reflects its Catholic foundation. The school takes its religious background seriously. This is done in a welcoming way. Staff ensure that the school is open and friendly. Pupils value the differences between people. Pupils understand why it is important for everyone to get along with each other. One example of this is the way that the school has developed strong systems to ensure that any pupils with mental health needs are

well supported. A central feature of this work is that much has been led successfully by pupils.

The school's expectations of pupils are high. These include how well pupils achieve, as well as their attitudes towards learning. Classes are calm and hard-working. Inspectors saw no instances of significant poor behaviour or disruption to learning.

Leaders have a detailed and accurate view of the strengths of the school. You are also clear about the things that you can improve further. For example, leaders identified that the strong teaching and learning in the school could be improved. Over time, the school has used a successful programme of training, together with research, to understand what is likely to work well. However, you are not shy to think again if you determine that an approach is not helping pupils as much as possible.

At the previous inspection, inspectors judged that teaching for some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), did not help them to achieve as much as possible. This was one of the triggers for the school's work to further improve teaching and learning. The honesty and thoroughness of the school's approach are indicated by the way that leaders extended the challenge to refine provision for pupils with SEND to encompass all pupils. Staff at the school know pupils very well. The school has recently introduced regular meetings to discuss each pupil's progress. These are followed up, when needed, by carefully planned actions that are subsequently analysed for their success. This means that pupils who may have been at risk of falling behind in their learning, or who have wider concerns that may have been missed, are now even better supported to do as well as they can.

At the same inspection, inspectors also told the school that pupils' attendance was not good enough. Leaders have ensured that there have been some improvements to attendance, particularly for younger pupils. Your plans include strategies to raise attendance further and, in so doing, to help pupils to make the most of the opportunities that the school provides.

An overwhelming proportion of the parents and carers, as well as members of staff, who shared their views on Ofsted's inspection questionnaires were positive about the school. For example, 95% of parents who responded to their questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to others.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff understand the importance of safeguarding pupils. There is also a systematic approach to training staff about the things that they need to know to ensure that pupils are safe. This all leads to pupils being well protected. When needed, leaders liaise carefully with agencies outside the school so that pupils receive the help and support that they need.

The checks made to confirm that adults in the school are suitable to work with pupils are completed carefully and recorded systematically.

The school's high expectations extend to how pupils look after themselves and others. Pupils get along well together. Problems such as bullying are very rare. The school's work on mental health and well-being has made pupils aware of how they can seek help and support each other. This has made them even safer.

Inspection findings

- The school's effective leadership is a clear strength of the school. The fairly recent change of headteacher did not slow the pace of school improvement. In fact, the fresh eyes of new senior leaders have allowed you to see how the school's effectiveness can be further improved. You are strongly supported by other senior and middle leaders and the staff team more widely. Leaders have created a staff culture where morale is high and staff are prepared to work very hard for the benefit of pupils. Leadership in the school is further strengthened by the very effective work of the governing body. Governors know what is expected of them. They are thorough in requiring staff to do the best job that they can.
- The progress of Year 11 pupils in their GCSE examinations has been strong over recent years. This has directly contributed to their high attainment. In 2018, pupils' progress was very strong, including for disadvantaged pupils, when compared to other pupils across the country. Within this, middle-attaining pupils had somewhat weaker progress than those with high starting points. Leaders ensure that there are systematic routines for assessing how well current pupils are doing. The system that the school uses to collect this data was changed for this school year to allow leaders to provide staff with more useful information in a more efficient way. This has been successful. School information indicates that pupils continue to make strong progress. Leaders' close focus on individuals means that any pupil who appears to be falling behind is quickly provided with teaching that can address their needs.
- Teaching and learning are effective. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Learning is well planned, including in the way that teachers ensure that pupils' knowledge builds over time. Pupils have confidence in their teachers, which helps to build positive classroom relationships. Pupils' learning is supported by strategies that leaders have judged will be effective from the research that they have done. For example, pupils are encouraged to learn by collaborating with each other and are given structured opportunities to reflect on what they are doing. Strategies like these are helping pupils to deepen their understanding. Homework is used in a purposeful way to further reinforce learning. Teachers' expectations in the classroom are high.
- In the past, attendance figures have been low because families have taken holidays during term time. In addition, too many pupils have had occasional days of absence as a result of minor illness. While there have been some recent improvements in attendance, including for those pupils who are persistently absent, attendance remains low for some groups, including disadvantaged pupils. The school's approach to improving attendance is systematic and comprehensive.

The school challenges pupils and their families if pupils are absent. The school also recognises and rewards high attendance. This approach has recently been strengthened. However, this strengthened approach is not having the full intended impact on the attendance of some pupils, including a greater proportion in key stage 4.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further reduce pupils' absence, including that of disadvantaged pupils and pupils in key stage 4, by ensuring that the strategies to challenge pupils and their families about poor attendance, as well as those to reward and celebrate good attendance, have a greater impact
- they further develop the evidence-based approaches used by the school to ensure that teaching leads to highly effective learning and that pupils' strong achievement improves even more.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the school's effectiveness. An inspector had a discussion with members of the governing body, including its chair, and with representatives of the local authority. An inspector met with a group of pupils. Inspectors also talked with other pupils around the school during lessons and breaks. Inspectors met with a group of subject leaders and with a parent. An inspector toured the school, accompanied by a small group of pupils and a senior leader. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in classes across the school. Some of this was done as a joint activity with a senior leader. For some of the inspectors' other observations, they were accompanied by another small group of pupils. An inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' books jointly with a senior leader. Inspectors examined documents, including: information about the safeguarding of pupils; the school's self-evaluation document; the improvement plan; other documents evaluating the work of the school; and information about pupils' achievement. Inspectors considered 95

responses completed this school year to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 44 additional written responses. Inspectors also reviewed 39 responses from members of staff to their online questionnaire.