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Mrs Jo Santinelli
Principal
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Dear Mrs Santinelli

Short inspection of St Benedict's Catholic College

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2018 with Ofsted Inspector John Wilson, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Pupils' attainment at GCSE in the core subjects of English and mathematics, and in science and humanities subjects, is above average. You have made adjustments to the key stage 3 curriculum to ensure that pupils are prepared to meet the demands of new GCSE examinations. The school's flexible approach to Year 9 as a transition year between key stages 3 and 4 has been well received by pupils, parents and carers.

On the day of the inspection, pupils behaved well. Questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and parents suggest that this is generally the case. Pupils were welcoming and spoke openly to inspectors about their sense of belonging to a St Benedict's College community. Pupils like coming to school because the adults who work with them know them well. As a result, attendance is above average and is improving further.

Staff are supportive of your vision and they are clear about their purpose in serving the children of your community. The majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school. The governing body provides effective support and challenge to the school because its members are ambitious for the school and they know the school well.

School leaders evaluate the school's strengths and areas for development well. You

rightly acknowledge that the improvements to teaching and pupils' progress in some subjects must now be reflected in other areas, particularly in creative and technology subjects. Your new organisation of departments in the school means that the school is well poised to generate improvement and share good practice, but new arrangements are too recent to see sufficient impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a culture where the safeguarding of pupils is taken very seriously. Safeguarding policies and procedures are secure. Staff and governors have received training and are knowledgeable about what to do if they have concerns about a child. Records show that professionals in and outside the school work together effectively to support vulnerable pupils. Pupils said that they feel safe in school because the adults who work with them know them well. Pupils had good information through their personal, health, social and economic lessons about how to protect themselves against unsafe internet use.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed four lines of enquiry in order to ascertain that the school remained good. The first of these was how the curriculum helps pupils to prepare for the next stage in education, employment or training. This was because outcomes for pupils in subjects other than English, mathematics, science and humanities were less strong than in those subjects.
- You have reviewed the curriculum so that, from Year 7 to Year 11, pupils can learn and practise the skills required for the new GCSE examinations. Pupils are enjoying the breadth that this has created and speak positively about the flexibility to try a range of subjects in Year 9 before making final decisions about GCSE courses. In addition, you have supported improvements in technology and creative arts subjects by ensuring that teachers have good subject knowledge and the resources they need to make learning more engaging. In discussion with pupils, we found that they would like more information about possible career pathways before they reach Year 11, to help them make meaningful connections between employment and academic study.
- The second area of focus for the inspection was the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This was because these pupils make poorer progress than their peers in subjects other than English. Inspectors investigated examination results and current assessment information and spoke to leaders responsible for tracking pupils' progress.
- Leaders have identified that some disadvantaged pupils need to improve their reading skills and have ensured that these pupils receive additional support. This is having a positive impact on their progress, attitudes to learning and attendance. You agreed with us that the progress of disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment requires further improvement.
- The third area of focus was improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all subject areas. This was because, during the previous inspection of the school, learning activities were not sufficiently well matched to pupils'

needs and abilities. During this inspection, we considered your organisation of leadership and management in the school and checked how you track the progress of pupils.

- You now have a leadership and management structure in the school which shows clear lines of accountability. You have also reorganised curriculum departments so that best practice is starting to be shared more effectively. You introduced a system of regular line-management meetings which focus on the progress pupils are making. You have adopted a whole-school approach to gathering information about pupils' progress at key points during the year. Staff understand that it is their responsibility to use this information to analyse what pupils have mastered and what they need to improve. As a result, in subject areas such as English, pupils are making rapid and secure progress. You recognise that, in some subjects, further support is required to bring about a similar acceleration of progress.
- The fourth area of focus was safeguarding and welfare of pupils in the school. This was because a higher-than-usual number of pupils had left the school during 2016/17. Inspectors considered the school's procedures and policies for safeguarding and welfare, looked at school records, spoke with school leaders and talked to pupils.
- Pupils told us 'Staff know us as individuals.' You showed a detailed knowledge of why pupils had left the school and how St Benedict's had supported their transfer to new schools. Leaders, teachers and support staff work very effectively in partnership with families and other stakeholders to ensure that pupils are well looked after at all stages. Pupils told inspectors that they are confident that they can report problems or concerns to staff who work with them, that they are listened to and that prompt action is taken if required.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the best practice in the school is shared across all subjects so that pupils' outcomes in all subjects reach the level of the best
- they adopt a systematic approach to providing all pupils with careers information and guidance in order to support the curriculum approach at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

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

Yours sincerely

Jenny Carpenter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection started with your self-evaluation of the school's performance. We agreed the lines of enquiry that the inspectors would follow during the inspection.

Inspectors looked at a range of school documentation, including current assessment information, safeguarding case studies and governing body minutes. Inspectors visited lessons, looked at work and had discussions with pupils. Other meetings were held with the vice-principals, assistant vice-principals, the special educational needs coordinator and the designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector spoke to the vice-chair of the governing body and the representative of the local authority.

Inspectors considered 43 responses to the staff survey and 164 responses to pupil surveys. In addition, inspectors took into account 146 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View.