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Michael Ferry
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Dear Mr Ferry

Short inspection of St Wilfrid's Catholic Comprehensive School, Crawley

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2018 with Catherine Davies, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Under your thoughtful and wise leadership, the school's popularity has continued to increase. Close to 100% of parents and carers would recommend it, describing it as 'exemplary', 'amazing' or 'second to none'. One described a child 'waking up in the morning and bursting into song at the thought of going to school'.

Your pupils and students were welcoming and keen to tell us about school life. All those we spoke to said they enjoy practically all their lessons and appreciate being made to work hard. I and my colleague did not see anything other than considerate behaviour around the school and attentive pupils and students in lessons.

Many outstanding aspects of the school's atmosphere and culture were captured in the October 2017 denominational inspection report. I and my colleague quickly sensed the 'holistic approach to excellence, permeating the life of the school' by:

- realising how all members of teaching and pastoral staff keep a constant eye on pupils' and students' health, safety and happiness
- exploring the well-considered, high-quality learning support given to all pupils, especially those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
- sensing how staff respect your leadership, are proud to work at the school and feel valued and supported (confirmed by their questionnaire responses)

- reading numerous parents' comments about how they feel welcomed as members of the school community
- appreciating how much the school liaises with and benefits from working with many local schools and organisations.

Pupils and students were adamant that, as well as studying the Catholic Church's views on a wide range of issues, they are always told to respect differences and value diversity. The thoughtful and mature way they discuss sensitive issues, such as different lifestyles or family structures, confirms how well the school prepares them for their futures. They learn about British values and wider moral, social and cultural issues throughout the curriculum. Sixth-formers have a thought-provoking session presented by an ex-offender and they and pupils learn about mental health.

The school's reputation for consideration of others is well deserved. Pupils and students volunteer within the local community and raise considerable funds for charities. In December 2017, well over 100 sixth-formers and many staff slept outside in the school courtyard; they raised over £9,000 for the school's five house charities, one being a local homeless organisation.

Most members of the very new governing body know they lack experience. However, led by a wise chair and one long-serving governor, they have enthusiasm, relevant expertise, keenly attend training and are determined to combine support with challenging questions. You welcome and value how governors encourage you at the same time as probing information, plans and suggestions you give them.

The single issue in the previous inspection report highlighted ways to generate more outstanding teaching and high examination grades. Leaders responded well and teaching is now more flexible, imaginative and challenging. We saw pupils helping each other to tackle work, responding thoughtfully to tricky questions and knowing what they needed to do to improve their work. We saw teachers sharing their expert subject knowledge and enthusiasm skilfully to guide learning.

The standards achieved by the most able pupils went up a little in the last couple of years, although they have the potential to go higher. Several pupils attained one or two grade 9 GCSEs in 2017 and one got three, which is commendable as only about 2,000 pupils did so nationally. Pupils' progress in the EBacc subjects was in the top 20% nationally in 2016 and 2017, and achievement in modern foreign languages and science subjects continued to be well above average. In the sixth form, practically all subjects had average value-added A-level results in 2017 and current school information suggests that progress is stronger this year.

Safeguarding is effective

All teaching and non-teaching staff, whatever their roles, know that they must be vigilant for the early signs of a child who might be at risk. Catering staff are fully alert to spotting changes in pupils' demeanour or behaviour and inform the relevant member of staff immediately. Pupils are also proactive if they have worries, as there is an inclusive culture of listening and responding if needed.

Swift and immediate actions are taken to safeguard pupils by contact with external agencies as required. Leaders carry out an NSPCC safeguarding audit regularly. With the safeguarding governor, they are currently reviewing and tightening up the school's record-keeping and storage arrangements.

The school regularly gets pupils to reflect on their use of social media and its potential dangers. The rare incidents of bullying and racism are dealt with immediately. It is not surprising that the pupils', parents' and staff's questionnaire responses about safety were extremely positive.

Inspection findings

- We discussed your GCSE and sixth-form results and explored the differences between subjects and groups of pupils. Your work on narrowing some variations made a difference in 2017; for example, boys' progress moved nearer to girls'.
- You know that the difference between the progress of disadvantaged and other pupils is still too wide, especially in the proportion attaining grade 4 (pass grades) in both English and mathematics. You described how difficult it is to appoint specialist mathematics teachers and hence you and a deputy headteacher are teaching the subject this year.
- Examining how you spend the funds you receive for disadvantaged pupils, it is clear that you reflect and make changes every year. However, you have not always set short-term targets which, when checked, might reveal that changes need to be made during the year.
- Visiting several lessons together, we agreed that pupils, especially lower attainers, do not always present their work carefully or legibly and teachers rarely tackle this. You shared your recent data showing how many pupils' reading ages were below their actual ages. We had seen an effective exploration about the meaning of words in a science lesson and agreed that all subject teachers could contribute more to strengthening literacy.
- My colleague was able to confirm that your improved and above-average attendance in 2015/16 has continued in all years. She also sought an explanation for the above-average number of fixed-term exclusions, which had peaked at over 100 in 2015/16. Pupils clearly responded well to your determination to have the highest standards of behaviour as the number halved in 2016/17 and there have only been 15 incidents so far this academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they persevere with frequent reviews of the support arranged for disadvantaged pupils and make adjustments if they are not generating the desired progress

- all teachers contribute to widening pupils' subject-specific and general vocabulary and to improving pupils' reading comprehension (insisting that they present their work legibly and neatly).

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I held meetings with you, several members of the senior leadership team, including the designated safeguarding lead, and the SEN coordinator. I met the chair and four other governors and two representatives of the local authority. We each attended an assembly.

Inspectors talked to pupils informally around the school and in lessons and held meetings with pupils in Year 8 and a group of sixth-form students. I heard some Years 7 and 8 pupils read and we discussed how well their fluency and comprehension were improving. With you or a member of the senior leadership team we visited a range of classes. We scrutinised documents related to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour and current progress. We read reviews of the school carried out by external advisers and followed through examples of safeguarding records.

Inspectors took into account questionnaire responses by 72 staff, 297 pupils and students and 148 parents. Most of the 144 parents who contributed to the free-text option wrote detailed comments.