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Mr Phil Grice
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Grice

Short inspection of St Bede's Catholic High School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2018 with David Roberts, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and other leaders, including governors, have an aspirational vision for the school's pupils. Pupils typically learn effectively, and they develop as confident and outward-looking citizens in their time at the school. Pupils' strength in these aspects is supported by the curriculum and opportunities you provide. Inspectors were struck by the positive attitude, courtesy and the high levels of self-esteem consistently demonstrated by the pupils at your school. The pupils we spoke with placed great emphasis on the school's culture, to 'Be a Bede'. They say that it helps to secure an inclusive, safe and aspirational community for all pupils at the school.

The school is well regarded in the community. It is oversubscribed, and the overwhelming majority of respondents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to others. Pupils told us that they like coming to school. They behave well around school and in lessons, and most of them attend regularly. Pupils' careers education is effective, and they move on successfully to next steps in education and employment.

You and other senior leaders that I met and spoke with during the inspection know the school well, as do the representatives of the Diocese of Lancaster and the local authority. You and they understand the school's strengths and those aspects requiring further strengthening. Leaders have resolved some of the weaker aspects

identified at the last inspection, such as the consistency of subject leadership. New and recent appointments, and leadership training, has secured effective subject leadership. Indeed, inspectors found that middle leadership is a strength of the school. These leaders provide accuracy, impetus and impact in spotting and securing rapid and sustainable improvements where they are required. They provide demonstrable capacity to improve further the standard of education provided at the school.

Examination results for some pupils dipped in 2017. Disadvantaged pupils made less progress than others nationally, as did pupils in mathematics, and some boys, especially in English. You described the steps that you and other leaders have taken to overcome this dip, and the impact that this has had in securing sustainably better outcomes for these pupils.

The pupils' work that we looked at confirmed the overall progress of current pupils is stronger than in 2017 and is good. We noted improvements for disadvantaged pupils, although you and other leaders are adamant that you will not be satisfied until the outcomes of these pupil's match those of others. Pupils, including boys, typically make good progress and learn well in English. This is also the case in science and a range of other subjects. You are aware of where some inconsistencies remain, within a small number of subjects, including mathematics, and in Year 7. You and other leaders described sensible plans to secure stronger outcomes in these aspects, and inspectors saw that actions being taken currently are having a positive impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff say that pupils' safety is secure. Checks made by inspectors showed staff know pupils well and are vigilant in supporting pupils' well-being. Staff are routinely updated about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies. They act swiftly when required. Inspectors checked that referrals are followed up and recorded. Systems to recruit staff safely are established. Safeguarding records are detailed and are well maintained.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet. This is supported by school security systems and filters. Pupils say that bullying is rare. Inspectors scrutinised school records and found that any incidents, including any examples of racist or homophobic bullying, are resolved. Leaders' systematic checking to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils who are absent from school, including any who may have routinely poor attendance, is effective. Inspectors checked and found that leaders manage effectively the safety of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision

Inspection findings

- The first area that we considered was whether schools leaders' use of the pupil premium funding secures these pupils' good attendance, behaviour and learning.

Inspectors noted that in 2016 and 2017 the attendance of these pupils was stubbornly low, that they were more likely than others to be excluded from school, and that their academic progress was not good. Governors described a plan to inspectors to overcome these weaknesses, based upon pupils' better attendance, leading to greater engagement and progress in school and learning. The actions you have put in place are securing important progress for disadvantaged pupils in these aspects.

- Disadvantaged pupils are now attending far more regularly, including some of those who were previously persistently absent. This is due, in large part, to the improved leadership of pupils' attendance. These staff focus on disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' good attendance is routinely recognised and rewarded. On the other hand, poor attendance is spotted quickly, and robust actions are taken to ensure that this does not become a habit. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is moving closer to others nationally, although it does not match these levels.
- You, and other leaders, have also taken effective steps to secure the improved behaviour of disadvantaged pupils. Each disadvantaged pupil has a specific plan to support his or her education and well-being. This plan, where required, includes one-to-one mentoring from an adult, to secure an uplift in pupils' engagement with all aspects of school. This strategy has had a positive impact, and disadvantaged pupils' exclusions have significantly reduced. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is on an upward trajectory. Inspectors noted your disappointment that it does not yet consistently match that of other pupils. However, the effective actions leaders have put into place to this point demonstrate the capacity to improve disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. Leaders have rectified key aspects of these pupils' progress that were previously too low.
- We investigated whether school leaders, including senior and middle leaders and those responsible for governance, take effective steps to improve and secure consistently good teaching, leading to pupils' progress. The previous inspection report noted that there were inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and leadership, notably subject leadership. You and other leaders were charged with putting right the weaknesses identified. Pupils' examination results were broadly in line with others nationally in 2016, but dipped in 2017 overall, to a low level. Too many pupils did not make the progress that they should in mathematics and boys' outcomes in English were weak. Inspectors found that leaders, including governors, have a secure understanding of the quality of teaching at the school. The actions that leaders take to improve teaching, such as the training they plan and provide for teachers, are effective. As a result, teachers typically ask pupils challenging questions and assess their learning accurately. This helps them to plan activities to strengthen and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. In mathematics, despite some variability, pupils move on to complex questions once they have mastered the basic skills, more swiftly than was the case previously. Consequently, current pupils are generally making the progress that they should across a range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with subject leaders and other middle leaders and found that they are a strength of the school. Subject leaders typically understand and make improvements that are required. For example, in English and science, teaching is

consistently effective because of good subject leadership. Boys' progress in English, which was previously inconsistent, is now a strength. Inspectors' scrutinised boys' work in English language and literature and were impressed by its standard. Boys engage with a wide range of texts and poems and write with confidence and fluency. Leadership of mathematics is effective, because it is improving the consistency of teaching rapidly and securely. Subject leadership in mathematics has been strengthened this year. Consequently, although some weaker teaching remains, and pupils' progress is more variable in mathematics than elsewhere, leadership is effective and is bringing about the improvements required.

- Leaders' systems to assess, monitor and evaluate pupils' achievement provide an accurate picture of pupils' progress. Most current pupils make the progress they should, across a broad range of subjects and year groups. Leaders have been forensic in their analysis of where any slower aspects of pupils' progress can be accelerated. They have been effective in supporting pupils to catch up and keep up. Leaders have accurately identified that, in some areas, including humanities and mathematics, some current Year 7 pupils do not consistently learn at the same rate as in others, such as English. As a result, middle leaders have sensible plans to refocus and strengthen their transition work, so that teachers routinely use the information that they are provided with to set work that challenges pupils to make the progress that they should in Year 7.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the improvements in current disadvantaged pupils' attendance, behaviour and progress continue to strengthen
- the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics are eradicated
- pupils' transition from primary school is further improved, so that they are consistently challenged by the work they are set in Year 7.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you and your school leaders, members of the governing

body, and a representative of the local authority. An interview took place, by telephone, with a representative of the Diocese of Lancaster. Inspectors met with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views on a variety of issues including safeguarding, careers education, well-being, behaviour and teaching. We examined a range of the school's documentation such as self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information, the pupil-premium plan, attendance and behaviour records, and safeguarding information. We considered 119 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and 65 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility, 183 responses to the Ofsted online pupil questionnaire and 53 responses to the Ofsted online staff questionnaire. We conducted learning walks, including some with senior leaders, across a range of subjects and year groups. We scrutinised the work in pupils' books by undertaking a work analysis together with school leaders.