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Mrs Catherine Baxendale
Acting Principal
St Thomas a Becket Catholic Secondary School, A Voluntary Academy
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Dear Mrs Baxendale

Short inspection of St Thomas a Becket Catholic Secondary School, A Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2017 with Peter McKenzie, 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 November 2017.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a clear vision for the school, which is shared and understood by all members of the school community. There is a culture of care and compassion for pupils, combined with high aspirations. Since the previous inspection, leadership roles have been restructured, creating additional capacity and a drive for continued improvement. Middle leaders feel empowered to carry out their roles, and staff are encouraged to innovate to ensure a good-quality learning experience for pupils. As a result of leaders' and governors' self-evaluation of the strengths and areas for improvement, you are focusing on the right priorities to improve the school further. Senior and middle leaders demonstrate strong capacity to improve the school further.

The vast majority of staff and pupils are proud of the school. Pupils are polite and welcoming and they wear their uniforms impeccably. The majority of parents are supportive of the school. One parent said, 'The school is welcoming and a supportive community.' Another parent commented that pupils learn in a 'safe and caring' environment. Pupils said that they feel safe in school and that they are well supported by staff. Pupils also told inspectors that they support each other through initiatives such as the anti-bullying council. Pupils talked very confidently about their roles as peer mentors. Twenty-two Year 11 pupils have been trained by the

Samaritans to provide support for other pupils. The core school rules of 'prepared, respect, safe' are central to the school ethos.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged and most-able pupils. You have set ambitious targets for all pupils. Systems to track pupils' progress are rigorous and enable you and other leaders to intervene when pupils are at risk of underachieving. As a result, a greater proportion of most-able pupils are achieving the top grades at GCSE. Provisional results for 2017 show that most-able pupils made strong progress in their GCSE subjects.

Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in all year groups. Disadvantaged Year 11 pupils made improved progress in their GCSEs in 2017. This was most marked in English and the English Baccalaureate subjects. Despite these improvements, you still acknowledge that there is work to do to ensure that more pupils achieve the top GCSE grades by the end of Year 11. You have rightly identified, as a whole-school priority, the need for most-able disadvantaged boys to make accelerated progress.

At the last inspection, careers education was identified as an area for improvement. Pupils now have access to a fully comprehensive careers programme so that they can make informed decisions about their future. Pupils talked positively about the range of advice and guidance they receive. This includes talks from colleges, advice about universities and apprenticeships, and opportunities to visit local businesses. You have also appointed a careers coordinator to ensure that pupils have access to the advice and guidance they need. As a result, over the last two years all pupils who left school are in employment, education or training.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. As a result of weekly staff safeguarding briefings, staff are alert to local safeguarding issues. The safeguarding team has recently expanded, which has increased the capacity of the team to support pupils further. Leaders refer appropriately to external agencies to ensure that pupils and families receive support when needed. The safeguarding leader provides strong leadership.

Staff are trained in safeguarding and are fully aware of the importance of their role in keeping pupils safe. Staff know how to refer any concerns, and leaders take prompt action when issues are raised.

Pupils said that they feel safe and they talked positively about the support they receive from staff. Pupils also told inspectors that there is always a member of staff they can talk to if they are facing difficulties either in or outside school. Pupils talk positively about the support they receive from peer mentors and the anti-bullying council, a group of trained Year 10 pupils.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, pupil outcomes and progress have remained good. Based on provisional outcomes for 2017, the number of pupils who achieved a 'strong' and 'standard' pass in English and mathematics is above the national average. The progress that pupils make in their GCSE examinations has remained above the national average for the last four years. The number of pupils who achieve the English Baccalaureate has also been above the national average in recent years. Pupils make particularly good progress in modern foreign languages and science.
- Disadvantaged pupils did not make as good progress as other pupils across their GCSE subjects in 2016. As a result of a well-thought-out strategy for improvement, they made better progress in 2017 in English, mathematics and the English Baccalaureate. Leaders and governors are aware that there is still work to do in order to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged most-able boys.
- In recent years, a higher proportion of pupils have achieved the top grades in their GCSEs. However, you acknowledge that in some subjects such as design and technology, music and Italian a greater proportion of pupils need to be challenged to achieve the top grades.
- The newly introduced assessment and feedback policy is encouraging pupils to think more deeply about their learning. Teachers quickly address misconceptions. Through the use of effective questioning and timely feedback, pupils are encouraged to refine and improve their work and to close gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills. You told inspectors that a priority this year is to ensure that the new policy is implemented consistently across year groups and subjects.
- Leaders rigorously evaluate the impact of teaching and learning strategies and staff professional development. Through learning walks, analysis of current pupil progress and reviewing work in pupils' books, leaders identify strong practice. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate and share ideas. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve.
- Pupils have very good attitudes towards learning. They are polite and respectful. Pupils told inspectors that learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. They appreciate the help and guidance they receive from their teachers.
- You recognise that exclusions increased last year. The new behaviour system, with a focus on rewards and making amends, has led to a reduction in exclusions so far this academic year. Most pupils are positive about the recently introduced 'no mobile phone' policy.
- Overall attendance is slightly above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved. However, you have rightly identified this as an area for further improvement. As a result, you have increased the amount of time the educational welfare officer is employed so that there is additional support for pupils who have more variable attendance. Although the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent has reduced, this is a key

priority in your plans for the use of funding that you receive to support disadvantaged pupils.

- Records of governing body minutes show that governors ask challenging questions of senior leaders. Governors know the strengths and areas for improvement of the school well. Governors complete a yearly skills audit to identify and fill any gaps in their skills. They receive regular training on aspects of safeguarding and school data. Governors produce their own development plan, which reflects the skills audit and the key priorities for the school. Leaders and governors ensure that staff appraisal is fit for purpose and that challenging objectives are set.
- Middle leaders have an accurate understanding of their departments. They are highly ambitious for their pupils and have high aspirations of staff. Middle leaders feel consulted and involved in decision-making. The majority of middle leaders are driving improvement in their subjects and are rightly focused on improving outcomes further for disadvantaged pupils. They are aware of any gaps in progress in their subjects and have clear plans in place to address underachievement.
- Leaders' rationale for the curriculum is clear. Despite the school being a smaller than average secondary school, leaders are committed to providing pupils with a wide range of options at GCSE including academic, artistic and creative subjects. Leaders continue to review the curriculum and are currently looking to implement a wider range of vocational subjects.
- The Bishop Konstant Catholic Academy Trust provides effective financial and human resources guidance and advice to the school. The Trust provided support to the governing body in the transition from the former to the current acting principal.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve and exclusions of disadvantaged pupils are reduced
- more pupils achieve the top GCSE grades in design and technology, music and Italian so that outcomes are more in line with those of other subjects
- the progress made by most-able disadvantaged boys improves.

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

Yours sincerely

Michele Costello
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors jointly observed a sample of classes with senior leaders. We also looked at the work in pupils' books with a senior leader. We met with you, senior and middle leaders and the chair of governors. We held a telephone discussion with a representative from the Trust and the school improvement partner.

We took account of 36 responses to parents to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, 42 responses to the staff survey and four responses to the pupil survey. We met with pupils from each year group and talked to them informally during breaktime.

We examined a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, governors' minutes and reports, attendance and behaviour logs, exclusion and attendance data and safeguarding records. We also reviewed the provisional 2017 GCSE results and the progress of current pupils.