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Mrs Helen Seddon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Seddon

Short inspection of Our Lady's Catholic College

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 2016 with Annette Patterson, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You all have a very strong knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. You have effectively addressed most of the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection and it is clearly evident that the school has continued to grow and improve.

Since becoming headteacher in September 2015, you have continued to provide the school with strong and compassionate leadership. You have successfully ensured that staff at the school continue to be ambitious for all pupils and relentlessly promote the inclusive and caring school values. Capably supported by school governors, you have managed some acute budgetary issues with foresight and sensitivity. The local community is becoming increasingly aware of the high-quality education provided by the school and it is hugely promising to note the strong growth in the number of parents who are choosing to send their children to the school in 2017/18. You and other leaders have ensured that the school community remains happy and harmonious. Members of staff enjoy working at the school and parents are extremely complimentary about the school's work. The wider school community is united in its determination to provide pupils at the school with a broad education that will enable them to thrive and flourish in modern Britain.

Middle leaders have made a significant contribution to improvements within the school. Leaders with responsibility for year groups have focused more sharply on

the academic progress being made by pupils. Leaders with responsibility for individual subjects have a very precise understanding of strengths and areas for development within their areas due to the effective monitoring of teaching and careful scrutiny of information about pupil performance. Leaders know what needs to be done to improve the school further and are taking appropriate actions to further develop the school's effectiveness. This, in turn, has led to many improvements across the school such as better attendance, reduced exclusions for poor behaviour and disadvantaged pupils making faster progress in most subjects. You recognise that further work is needed to improve the quality of pupils' writing across the curriculum to raise their outcomes further.

Leaders have secured improvements to the quality of teaching across the school. Teaching is particularly effective for low- and middle-ability pupils. You are focusing appropriately on improving progress rates for the most able. Pupils respond positively to feedback from their teachers that pinpoints precisely what they need to do to improve their work. One parent commented that teachers routinely 'go the extra mile' by providing a range of extra lessons and revision classes to ensure that no pupil falls behind. Pupils are now making faster progress in most subjects. Pupils make exceptionally quick progress in key stage 4 in subjects such as business studies, health and social care, and information technology. Students make equally rapid progress in the sixth form in vocational courses. In the majority of subjects across the school, pupils make progress from their starting points that is at least broadly in line with national averages. Pupils in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form benefit from good-quality careers advice and guidance. This aspect of provision is not as strong in key stage 3.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has created a culture in which the safety and well-being of pupils are paramount. Safeguarding arrangements are clearly fit for purpose and records are detailed and precise. Staff at all levels receive appropriate training that equips them with a clear understanding of safeguarding issues. They are vigilant to signs of abuse and neglect and this has led to a significant increase in the number of referrals made to the school's designated safeguarding lead. The school liaises effectively with external agencies. For example, officers from the Lancashire constabulary have recently delivered training to staff on radicalisation and the government's 'Prevent' duty.

The school supports pupils to keep themselves safe very effectively. The school's approach to e-safety, in particular, is thorough and innovative. In addition to 'focus weeks' that build pupils' awareness of online dangers, a group of 'digital leaders' play an active role in teaching their fellow pupils about how to keep safe online. Leaders are also keen to exploit opportunities to raise parental awareness of potential threats to their children's health and well-being and parents evenings are often utilised to provide parents with valuable information.

Inspection findings

- Governors have overseen a period of considerable change in the leadership of the school since the last inspection. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2015 and the senior leadership team has reduced in size.
- Governors have acted as 'critical friends' to the school. They have challenged leaders to secure continuous improvements during a period of financial hardship caused by low pupil numbers. The expertise of governors is well matched to their roles on the governing body and they have recently assumed the responsibility for being 'link governors' for different subjects.
- Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is significantly below the national average. Despite this, the proportion of pupils attaining at least a C grade in both English and mathematics is almost identical to the national average.
- From their starting points, pupils make progress across the curriculum that is marginally better than national averages. Low- and middle-ability pupils make progress that is faster than national averages whereas high-ability pupils make progress that is in line with the national average.
- By the end of key stage 4, pupils make varying rates of progress across the curriculum. Pupils make slightly faster progress in mathematics than English. Progress in other traditional academic subjects is slower than the impressive rates of progress made in vocational courses, information technology and religious studies. Leaders have robust plans in place to address underperformance in subjects where pupils make slower progress.
- Very few pupils achieve the English baccalaureate because only a small number of pupils choose to study a foreign language in key stage 4.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress across the curriculum and there is only a small difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in the school and other pupils nationally. Leaders are astute in their use of additional funds to support the disadvantaged and they rigorously evaluate the impact of different strategies that have been implemented. Disadvantaged pupils now attend school more regularly and are less likely to receive fixed-term exclusions.
- Staff and pupils say that behaviour in lessons and around the site is good and improving. Leaders have adopted a more proportionate approach to behaviour management with the introduction of a clear tariff system. Leaders report a significant reduction in the number of serious incidents as well as a decreasing frequency of low-level misbehaviour in lessons. They do, however, acknowledge that behaviour could be improved further by a more consistent application of the behaviour policy by all staff.
- Pupils are now less likely to be excluded from school. Leaders have revamped the on-site inclusion unit, which acts as an effective deterrent to poor behaviour while supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties to rehabilitate back into their usual lessons. Vulnerable pupils who often find it difficult to access mainstream lessons are supported effectively in the school's nurturing 'arc' facility. Leaders

have also increased the focus on rewarding pupils and the pupils are responding to this shift in emphasis very positively.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively. Teachers receive high-quality training that equips them with the skills to support pupils who have different needs and teachers make excellent use of individual education plans and 'pupil portraits' to provide effective personalised support. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and there are robust systems in place to manage their performance.
- Pupils respond positively to a range of opportunities to enhance their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils are regularly encouraged to 'do the right thing' in assemblies and pupils raise considerable sums of money for charities such as Cancer Research and the Nepalese earthquake. Leaders also place a high priority on pupils learning about other religions and cultures and the school enjoys links with partner schools in South Africa and Uganda.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils now progress to appropriate destinations when they leave the school or sixth form. This is primarily due to the appointment of a careers adviser who has prioritised the provision of highly personalised support for all pupils and students in years 11, 12 and 13. Pupils now have a better understanding of the options available to them and are more knowledgeable about different careers. Vulnerable pupils receive particularly close guidance and members of staff are tenacious in ensuring that no pupil leaves school without an appropriate destination lined up. Leaders are rightly proud of this transformation but they now acknowledge the need to develop pupils' knowledge of careers lower down the school.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan work that is well matched to their needs. Where variability exists, it tends to be in provision for the most able pupils. Not all teachers have the highest expectations of what the most able are capable of achieving and they need to ensure that work set for this group provides the necessary stretch and challenge to help them consistently secure the highest grades.
- Leaders have introduced an ambitious plan for promoting literacy and improving pupils' reading skills. Standalone literacy lessons have been introduced in key stage 3 as have timetabled library lessons where pupils' reading skills are regularly tested. This has resulted in pupils reading with greater fluency and confidence in different subjects. Pupils' writing skills, however, are not yet developed as effectively across the curriculum.
- Students make exceptionally strong progress on vocational courses in the sixth form. Students make progress that is broadly average on academic courses but a higher proportion than average attain high grades at A levels in traditional academic subjects and many attend Russell Group universities after leaving the sixth form. Students have made significantly slower progress than national averages on academic courses in Year 12 in the past. However, there are clear signs that rates of progress on these courses are quickening as leaders focus on this area and due to the introduction of robust systems for ensuring that students embark upon courses that are well suited to their interests and

aptitudes.

- Students who retake GCSEs in English and mathematics in the sixth form are extremely well supported and the vast majority improve their grades to a level that enables them to access a higher level of further study.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build upon the excellent recent work in key stage 4 and the sixth form by developing more comprehensive careers education for pupils in Years 7 and 8
- all staff have the highest expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve
- they focus on improving pupils' writing across the curriculum.

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

Will Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors undertook 'learning walks' and observed teaching and learning in many subjects across the school.
- Meetings took place with you, your deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders, members of staff, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and groups of pupils.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils to gather their views on behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in pupils' books during lessons.
- Inspectors examined a range of supporting documentation such as the school's self-evaluation and development plan.
- Inspectors took into account 49 responses to the online parental questionnaire, along with 40 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- At the start of the inspection the following lines of enquiry were outlined to the headteacher. How effectively:
 - is provision made for different groups of pupils, particularly the disadvantaged and the most able

- are pupils supported to progress to an appropriate range of destinations when they leave the school
- is provision made for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- are the personal development and welfare of pupils promoted
- are leaders addressing issues with underperformance on some academic courses in Year 12
- are safeguarding procedures protecting pupils?