

1 February 2018

Mr Des Callaghan
Headteacher
St Bede's Roman Catholic High School
Green Lane
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB2 4SR

Dear Mr Callaghan

Short inspection of St Bede's Roman Catholic High School, Blackburn

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2018 with Jackie Cahalin, 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 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 your senior leaders have put in place effective monitoring procedures. Your knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of each area of your school's practice is always detailed and up to date. You have clearly defined the distinct monitoring roles of middle and senior leaders. By sharing good practice and swiftly addressing the areas which need to improve, you ensure that quality and standards do not deteriorate.

You have made considerable changes to subject leadership in key areas. Your subject leaders are enthusiastic subject specialists. They relish taking on new ideas and responsibilities. They play an important role in securing improvements in the quality of teaching and in the rates of pupils' progress in those subjects which underperformed in the past.

Staff are loyal to you and to the school. They feel that senior leaders and governors value their hard work and determination. They appreciate the professional development opportunities that you give them and the trust that you place in them to make their own decisions. Your newest teachers feel very well supported. Established staff are inducting them into a school community which has high expectations of work and behaviour.

Teachers and support staff welcome working with other schools, such as those within the Tauheedul Trust. They believe that the quality of teaching at St. Bede's benefits from the ideas which teachers and leaders share in networks. Your staff

enjoy providing continuous professional development for other schools.

The governors of your school bring a high level of professional, academic and educational skills to their roles and give their time generously. Their skills and experience enable them to hold you and your staff to account. They ask forthright and detailed questions about all areas of school life. The new committee structure has allowed governors to explore issues in depth. Their knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development is impressive.

Pupils were keen to talk to inspectors. They are proud of their school. They believe that the teaching they experience helps them to enjoy learning and achieve their potential.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors asked you to improve teaching and progress for the most able, embed new approaches to marking and make sure that the website contains all required information. You have addressed these areas successfully.

In the years following the last inspection, significantly more pupils gained A and A* grades at GCSE. However, you have identified that most-able pupils currently do not make as much progress as other groups in the school. This remains an area for development. You have reviewed the examination entry policy so that most-able pupils now have more opportunity to achieve the top grades. The new arrangements for triple science allow the most able scientists to achieve to their very best. Staff have reviewed schemes of work to reflect higher expectations and to focus on the development of pupils' skills as well as their knowledge and understanding. Scrutiny of English and mathematics work during the inspection indicated that the most able pupils complete very challenging tasks, particularly in extended writing in English and reasoning and problem solving in mathematics.

Pupils said that they find feedback from teachers very helpful. When looking at pupils' work, my colleague and I found that they use teachers' feedback very well to make corrections and improve their work.

The school's website is very well organised. Staff have presented and organised information in a way which makes it easy to find and understand. It contains all required information.

Your policy of identifying underperformance as early as possible has enabled staff to provide targeted support from Year 7. As a result, pupils need less additional help as they move up the school and are in a better position to achieve well at key stage 4. Leaders have used funding well for pupils who came to St. Bede's with low levels of numeracy and literacy. Well-devised early intervention has ensured that the majority are catching up with their peers and therefore have the reading, writing and mathematical skills to support their learning in all subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Questionnaires indicate that the majority of parents and carers have confidence in the systems and policies that you have put in place to keep your pupils safe from physical and emotional harm.

You have doubled the size of the child protection team to enable closer monitoring and support for vulnerable pupils. Records are detailed, well organised and up to date. You have checked that all staff are suitable to work with children and young people. Staff have undertaken all required training to ensure that they can recognise signs of abuse and know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's safety or welfare. They use a wide range of agencies to support pupils and families who need additional help. They are tenacious in ensuring that these agencies fulfil their responsibilities.

Pupils feel safe in school. Teachers and visitors have alerted them to the dangers of the internet and social media. Strong firewalls and filtering systems ensure that no one can access inappropriate websites while in school.

Inspection findings

- Examination results in 2016 and 2017 indicate that pupils make approximately the same progress as those pupils nationally who achieved similar results at the end of Year 6. Pupils continue to excel in music, art, drama, religious education and physical education.
- Disadvantaged pupils make less progress than their peers, especially in English. You have ensured that these pupils are a high priority for pastoral and academic staff. Plans carefully identify the barriers that these pupils face. Leaders have allocated the pupil premium funding to appropriate activities and to provide extra time for staff to monitor and support the attendance, behaviour and progress of this group. Some of these strategies have been successful. Leaders have been very reflective and creative in their approach. They have analysed which strategies have been less effective. Leaders are about to introduce new ideas such as the Military School, which is designed to develop life skills and qualities such as resilience and self-esteem. However, although these pupils are now making better progress, they still have not caught up with their peers.
- Staff work hard to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Overall, school attendance is generally above the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains below that of others in the school and nationally. Pastoral staff have put in place a range of strategies to improve this picture, and the attendance of this group is beginning to improve. Despite the school's best efforts, the punctuality of this group is not improving. Too many disadvantaged pupils still arrive late at the start of the school day.
- I was interested to know why the percentage of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was below the national figure, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. School information shows that EBacc entries were affected by the low number of pupils choosing modern foreign languages. You have

reversed this trend. Enthusiastic leadership of this department has led to improved schemes of work and engaging teaching. The number now opting for modern foreign languages is increasing considerably year on year.

- A minority of parents expressed concerns about bullying. My colleague discussed this with pupils and staff and carefully scrutinised school records. The school takes bullying very seriously and records all incidents. Records show that there are some cases of bullying but that the school deals with them well. Staff take swift and appropriate action. They inform and involve parents and use outside agencies if necessary.
- The school is a calm and purposeful learning environment. Pupils behave well in lessons and during social times. Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive. Teachers supervise unobtrusively so that pupils can take responsibility for their own behaviour. The well-staffed college system ensures that adults working in the school know the academic, pastoral and behavioural needs of each and every individual. School records show that, on the rare occasions when pupils behave badly, staff do not hesitate to use appropriate sanctions. No derogatory language is tolerated.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance, punctuality and progress of disadvantaged pupils improves to, at least, match that of their peers
- the most able pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Kelly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I had discussions with you, your leadership team and members of the governing body. Jointly with members of your senior leadership team, my inspector colleague and I observed teaching. We spoke to a range of pupils in lessons, in discussion groups and at social times. My colleague listened to pupils read and scrutinised reading records. With your middle leaders, we looked at pupils' work. We analysed the website and a range of documents, including the single central record, records of child protection and staff training, records of

behaviour incidents and bullying, school self-evaluation and improvement planning. We discussed with senior leaders aspects of safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, and the use of funding. We spoke to a cross-section of teachers. We considered 92 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of free-text comments made by parents. We also considered 223 responses to Ofsted's online pupils' questionnaire and 47 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. In addition, we considered a large number of responses to the school's own pupil and parent questionnaires.