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Mr Peter Croft
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Dear Mr Croft

Short inspection of St Bernard's Catholic High School

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 2019 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 June 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There has been considerable change in the school since the last inspection. There were a number of changes to staffing just as you became the headteacher in May 2017. These changes led to some instability as a number of supply teachers were needed over the year leading to the 2018 GCSE examinations.

You have undertaken a considerable recruitment process and the school is now returned to a place of stability. Together with your leadership team, you are ready and eager to move the school forward. You know the school well and have appropriate plans in place to bring about improvement across a number of areas. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these plans.

You have strengthened middle leadership through a programme of training and support. Many of your middle leaders are now driving improvement across their areas of responsibility. However, some middle leaders are not as strong, and this is leading to inconsistencies in the improvement of teaching and learning.

The new leader for teaching and learning has introduced monitoring processes that allow you to build on teachers' strengths and help them to improve their areas of weakness. As well as individual support for teachers, there is whole-school training that encourages them to improve their practice by trying new teaching methods.

The focus has been on ensuring that there is no teaching in the school that is less than good. You have met with some success in this area. However, there is still evidence of weaker teaching that does not meet the needs of all pupils.

Pupils are typically polite and friendly. In social areas, pupils behave well and enjoy meeting and talking with their friends. They interact with the teachers who are on duty and the atmosphere is safe and friendly. In classrooms, most pupils stay on-task and work hard for their teachers.

The parents and carers who replied to the online survey were very positive about the school and felt that their children were safe and well looked after. They felt that communication from the school was strong. However, pupils and staff told us that there are some instances of poor behaviour. This poor behaviour is only from a small cohort of pupils, but does cause disruption to pupils' learning. Pupils say that this usually happens when teachers do not follow the school behaviour policy.

Governors are well informed, know the school well and understand its strengths and areas for development. They use this knowledge to hold you to account for school performance. They are aware that the school is on a journey and that there remain a number of areas that require some improvement.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with high prior attainment. While you have taken action, this has met with only limited success and these pupils continue to make less progress than their peers nationally. You were also asked to improve progress for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You have brought about considerable improvement in the support that these pupils receive.

Safeguarding is effective.

The regular and frequent training of staff, together with effective policies and practices, ensure that you have created a culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff are vigilant, and follow up concerns promptly when necessary.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and told me that bullying did happen but was dealt with effectively by staff. Pupils typically enjoy coming to school and feel safe when they are there. They trust their teachers and know who to talk to when they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- The inspection followed several lines of enquiry. The first was to see how successful you have been in strengthening the performance of middle leaders so that they can improve teaching and learning across all areas. You have put appropriate processes in place to develop middle leadership and there are now some areas of strength. However, there are also some subject areas where leadership is weak. As a result, the progress that pupils make is dependent on

who teaches them.

- Despite providing training, many teachers do not use assessment effectively to plan learning that meets the needs of all their pupils. Consequently, those pupils with high prior attainment are not always challenged effectively by the tasks that teachers set. As a result, higher-attaining pupils make less progress than their peers nationally.
- My second line of enquiry was to see how well you were helping disadvantaged pupils to overcome their barriers to learning and make better progress. You are in the process of producing pupil profiles for disadvantaged pupils to let all teachers know how best to help each of these pupils to learn. However, these profiles are not yet in place. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are not making improved progress.
- My third line of enquiry was to see how successful you have been in reducing the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school. While overall attendance rates have improved, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school remains higher than national averages.
- In order to improve behaviour, you have introduced a new, more rigorous behaviour policy. When this policy was implemented, a number of pupils had difficulty moderating their behaviour to reach the higher expectations. At the start of the year this resulted in an increase in the proportion of pupils excluded for a fixed period. However, this is reducing as the year goes on. Nonetheless, overall the proportion of pupils excluded for a fixed period has increased slightly this year.
- My final line of enquiry was to see how well you identify and support the needs of pupils with SEND. The care that you provide for these pupils is strong. Effective transition processes ensure that pupils' needs are understood and supported as soon as they join the school. There is effective support for these pupils during lessons and there are safe places for them to go during social times.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to strengthen the quality of middle leadership in order to drive consistent, high-quality teaching across the school
- teachers use assessment effectively to plan teaching to meet the needs of all pupils, and particularly those with high prior attainment
- consistent application of the behaviour policy helps pupils to regulate their own behaviour so that the proportion excluded from school for a fixed period is in line with the national average for all groups of pupils
- a sharp focus on overcoming disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning
 - increases the progress of these pupils so that it is in line with that of other pupils nationally
 - reduces the proportion who are persistently absent to be in line with the figure

for all pupils nationally.

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 Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies; information on pupils' performance and attendance; and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan.

Inspectors met with you and other members of your leadership team. I met with the vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke to the local authority representative.

Jointly with school leaders, inspectors observed learning in several subject areas and looked at work in pupils' books. We spoke formally and informally to groups of pupils from all year groups. We observed pupils' behaviour, both in lessons and during social times.

We reviewed the 49 responses to the pupils' survey and the 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered the nine responses that parents submitted to the free-text service as well as the 42 responses to the staff questionnaire.