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Mr Karl Brown
Principal
Blessed William Howard Catholic School
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Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of Blessed William Howard Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 29 January 2019 with Clare Considine, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment in September 2018, when the school joined the Painsley multi-academy trust, you have acted decisively to improve the quality of teaching and to secure better outcomes for pupils. With the strong support of the trust's chief executive officer (CEO) and the board of directors, you are implementing an ambitious improvement agenda. As a result, the culture of the school is changing rapidly and there is a strong sense of purpose among staff and pupils at Blessed William Howard Catholic School.

The scale and the pace of change since your appointment have been considerable. The leadership team was restructured and its capacity will be further increased with the appointment of two new vice-principals, due to start in the summer term. With the support of the trust's CEO and colleagues in the leadership team, you have redesigned the curriculum. Since the start of this term, pupils follow three different learning pathways that match their preferences and abilities. To deliver these pathways, there is a new timetable that allows more flexibility to include pupils' option choices, including a new vocational course. You have also introduced substantial changes to the behaviour policy, with a new system of rewards and sanctions. The impact of these new structures, approaches and policies is undeniably positive. There is clear evidence that pupils make more progress and that their behaviour has improved.

The school supports effectively the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. All pupils have access to a wide range of activities that enrich their curriculum. Visits and trips, including foreign travels, art, sport, drama, and music, contribute to the well-rounded education pupils receive. The school has an inclusive ethos, and pupils are clear about the values that direct every aspect of the school life. The school actively encourages pupils' involvement in the community and in charitable work. The vast majority of pupils enjoy school and come across as happy, confident and considerate.

While the changes you have introduced have been well received by the vast majority of staff and pupils, some parents have expressed reservations about the school, especially concerning the new approaches to homework, in their responses to surveys conducted during the inspection. You are aware that you still have to gain the approval of a number of parents and you are developing strategies to engage with parents to address this issue.

The key aspects of the improvement agenda you are leading are still in the implementation phase. Some inconsistencies persist. To secure a high level of consistency in the quality of teaching and to sustain pupils' progress, the approaches that delivered early successes in raising achievement and in establishing a culture of positive behaviour have to be fully embedded.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has robust systems in place to support its culture of safeguarding. Leaders and directors make sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are well kept and up to date. Training is also up to date for all members of staff. As a result, all adults who work at the school are fully aware of their responsibility to ensure pupils' safety and to help protecting those who are vulnerable. When required, leaders in charge of safeguarding work well with families and external agencies to secure effective resolution of problems.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school because they know who to talk to in confidence should they need to do so. The school is proactive in tackling bullying and, last year, it received the national Diana award for creating an anti-bullying environment. Safe behaviour, including online, is covered in many areas of the curriculum and during dedicated days when pupils attend talks from external speakers, including the police, members of the community and parents

Inspection findings

- You were appointed by the trust with a clear agenda to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and to secure improved outcomes for pupils. Your focus on establishing a culture of high expectations and pursuit of academic excellence is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and the attitudes to learning of pupils.
- Teaching is well structured and focused on supporting the progress of all pupils. Subject leaders provide effective support to their teams. They ensure that the

curriculum is covered effectively, so that pupils acquire the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in examinations and to proceed to the next stage of their education.

- The new curriculum, introduced this term, allows teachers to focus more accurately on the needs of the pupils. Senior leaders and subject leaders work closely together to monitor the impact of teaching on the progress of pupils of all abilities. You have established a rigorous and transparent system to monitor closely the quality of teaching, while engaging teachers in a dialogue about their own professional development.
- The close working relationship with the other secondary school in the trust, which as a teaching school has extensive expertise in developing effective teaching practices, is acknowledged as very positive by the staff at Blessed William Howard. In addition to the formal training provided by the teaching school, leaders and staff from both schools benefit from an ongoing collaboration that allows them to share practices and develop new teaching materials.
- There has been a reduction in the number of students in the sixth form over the last few years. However, the partnership with the Stafford collegiate allows the school to offer students who opt to stay in the sixth form a wide range of subjects. The vast majority of students study for academic A levels. Students receive high-quality information and guidance to help them with their choice of subjects. The delivery of lessons across the collegiate is well organised. There is a rigorous quality assurance system in place to ensure that standards are high across the collegiate. As a result, students are making good progress. The majority of students move on to higher education and a small number to employment or training.
- You have made the improvement of behaviour one of your key priorities to improve standards. You have introduced a new system of rewards and sanctions which sets high expectations for pupils and clear guidelines for staff. As a result, behaviour is improving, although strategies are not yet consistently applied. There has been a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions. Pupils' conduct in lessons and around school is overwhelmingly positive.
- The new systems to improve attendance are having a positive effect on reducing the rate of absences, including persistent absences, for all groups of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the successful strategies recently implemented to foster positive pupils' attitudes are embedded and applied consistently
- the many changes that have been introduced to improve progress and outcomes for all groups of pupils at key stage 4 are fully embedded.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham,

the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Amieli
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with you, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, senior leaders, subject leaders, a group of teachers, the chair and vice-chair of the board of directors, and a diocese senior education adviser. Inspectors also met with groups of key stages 3, 4 and 5 pupils and talked to pupils informally. Inspectors observed teaching across the school (which included visits to lessons with you and senior leaders), looked at pupils' work in their books and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors scrutinised key documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, evaluation of the quality of teaching, information about pupils' progress, behaviour and safety, and attendance. The inspectors took into account the 121 responses to Ofsted online questionnaire Parent View and accompanying free-text comments.