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Dear Graham Wilson

Short inspection of Saint George Catholic Voluntary Aided College Southampton

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 2016 with Gary Anderson, 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 2011.

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 developed a strong team who zealously strive towards outstanding education in the future. The school community is flourishing, with a rising roll, because of the clear vision and leadership that you and your senior leadership team provide. You, together with governors and the senior leadership team, have an accurate understanding of the school and use this to identify strengths and respond well to any areas for development. You usefully obtain external validation of the quality of your work from the local authority, your school improvement partner and through working with other local schools.

Since the last inspection, the school has continued to focus on the areas identified for improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching and the proportion of pupils achieving five higher-grade GCSEs including English and mathematics have improved significantly. Standards in mathematics and humanities have been high for some time and they continue to improve. Very high-quality teaching enables pupils to make excellent progress in these subjects. The quality of teaching in English has improved significantly recently and pupils are now making much better progress than they have done in the past. Although improvements have been made, leaders and governors openly reflect that more needs to be done to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in science, is consistently as good as the best practice in the school.

Saint George Catholic College has a very strong community spirit and is a warm and welcoming place to be. Pupils are rightly proud of their school and their behaviour remains very good. The school's inclusive Christian ethos and shared core values nurture excellent working relationships between staff and pupils. Consequently, all pupils' pastoral and welfare needs are given careful support, alongside their academic requirements. Pupils were keen to share with inspectors that they feel that staff care for them and understand their needs.

The quality of teaching and assessment is well led and managed and so has improved. Most teachers plan interesting lessons and many use highly effective probing questions to promote deeper thinking and reflection. Where this happens, teachers ensure a swift pace of learning, pupils know their targets and high-quality work in their books demonstrates the good progress they make. As a result, pupils do as well as, or better than, other pupils nationally in their GCSE examinations in nearly all subject areas. Leaders and governors are aware that in a small minority of lessons teachers offer less challenge and the feedback that they give pupils is less precise. Where this happens, the pace of learning is slower. Effective systems are in place to support these teachers to improve.

Staff morale is very high, there is a sense of pride in the school's improvement and the quality of learning from staff is shared by the pupils. Displays in corridors and classrooms celebrate the high standards that pupils are achieving. Pupils confidently welcome visitors, are proud to discuss their work and clearly enjoy working with their teachers and each other.

Pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils) have not achieved as well as their peers in the past. You and governors have rightly viewed this as an urgent priority and have taken effective steps to improve the progress that this group makes. Leaders are aware that there remains more to be done to fully close these gaps.

Overall attendance has been above the national average for some time and was identified by the local authority as being the best in Southampton last year. Although proud of this achievement, you rightly recognised that the attendance of pupils eligible for the pupil premium and those with special educational needs could be improved. You ensured that a range of successful initiatives were introduced to raise attendance still further. As a result, overall attendance and the attendance of all groups of pupils are currently above the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors quite rightly place a very strong emphasis on pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders and governors take a rigorous and proactive approach towards safety. All policies and guidelines on all applicable aspects of safeguarding are in place and clearly steer the very good practice in the school, fostering a culture of vigilance. Records are detailed and meticulously maintained. Appropriate checks are made against all adults who work with pupils and staff receive relevant and regular training on safeguarding. Regular communication between key staff and

other agencies ensures timely and effective support for pupils of concern and reviews the impact of actions already taken.

Through tutor times and assemblies, pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Pupils confirm that they feel safe and know that members of staff are always available for them to share any concerns they may have.

Inspection findings

- The school's effectiveness remains securely good. You give the school strong, purposeful and strategic leadership. You have recruited wisely and invested in training staff to create a talented and dedicated team with clear lines of responsibility for academic and pastoral leadership. This has led to significantly improved standards of achievement. In addition, the recent skills audit and review of the governing body has focused the support and challenge that the governing body bring to the school. You are now very ably supported by your senior team and governing body to bring about further improvements.
- Governors are a highly dedicated and effective team and they exercise good strategic oversight of the work of the school. They offer wise and insightful challenge to you and your senior team. The chair of the governing body is rightly very proud of the school and he ensures that the governing body offers very good strategic support for its development.
- The school has invested in extra lessons and a range of resources to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs or disability. As a result, the gaps between the progress made by these groups and their peers are closing in nearly all year groups. However, leaders are aware that more needs to be done to close the gaps in Year 9 between these groups and their peers in mathematics and English.
- Leaders have responded well to the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. Tracking systems accurately monitor the school's performance and improvement planning identifies appropriate actions and expected outcomes. Although these systems identify a range of useful information about pupil progress and behaviour, patterns in this information are not always analysed or evaluated with sufficient rigour. Governors and senior leaders agree that sharper evaluation will enable priority to be given to the most effective interventions, so raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs or disability to even higher levels.
- Outcomes at key stage 4 have improved over the past two years and the school's own assessment information shows that, overall, this improvement is continuing and most pupils are making good progress. Leaders have invested in staff training and resources in English which have led to pupils making significantly better progress at GCSE.

- Leaders are passionate about wanting the best for every pupil and relationships between staff and pupils are particularly strong. The Trinity Inclusions Centre (provision to support vulnerable pupils) is well led and is valued by the pupils. Staff work well together to inspire and challenge the pupils and communicate well with parents. As a result, pupils are well supported and the number of exclusions has fallen considerably.
- There is a range of successful strategies to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders monitor teaching and use the information gained to steer individual support, coaching and wider whole-school training. There are many opportunities to share good practice, for example through departmental meetings and whole-school briefings.
- Most teachers have high expectations and use their good subject knowledge to design stimulating lessons. They focus clearly on pupils' intended learning. Teachers in mathematics and humanities give precise feedback and guidance to pupils who then use this to improve their work. Inspectors witnessed how several teachers use questioning and discussion very effectively to probe and develop pupils' understanding. Where all of these activities take place regularly, pupils' books evidence how they make good progress in lessons and over time. In some science lessons seen, and in a very small minority of English lessons, the teacher's expectations were not as high and so the pace of learning was slower.
- Senior leaders regularly evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in lessons to identify strengths and priorities swiftly. For example, senior leaders have rightly prioritised ensuring that all teachers concentrate on literacy and the accurate use of subject-specific vocabulary to support more pupils to make higher levels of progress. Inspectors observed teachers promoting literacy and challenging pupils to produce detailed explanations in English, history and mathematics lessons. As a result, pupils were confidently discussing and analysing difficult concepts in depth.
- Behaviour is very good. Pupils are polite, friendly and continue to conduct themselves very well in lessons and around the school site. They value their learning and play a full part in lessons. When challenged, many can demonstrate sophisticated learning skills and offer thoughtful and reflective comments in group and whole-class discussions. For example, in a religious education lesson all pupils were engaged in a rich and fascinating discussion which involved the fluent use of some impressive vocabulary.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and happy at the school and parents confirmed this view. Bullying was thought to be rare and pupils are confident that any issues that do arise are swiftly resolved by staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- consistently high expectations, pace and challenge are maintained throughout the school in all lessons
- more thorough evaluation of pupil progress information prioritises the most effective strategies to support disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs or disability in all year groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited 14 lessons in the school and looked at learning jointly with the headteacher and senior leaders. We spoke with pupils in lessons and looked at some of their work as well as meeting with pupils both formally and informally. Meetings were held with governors and senior leaders. I held telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and the school improvement partner. Documentary evidence, including policies, strategic planning documents and analyses of pupils' achievements, were evaluated. We also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and records of governing body meetings. I also evaluated the responses of 83 parents to the online Parent View survey.