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Dear Brendan Wall

Short inspection of St Simon Stock Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 2016 with Matthew Brown, 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 January 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils benefit from effective teaching that engages their interest. Pupils are attentive, work hard and achieve well. Learning in class is complemented by a wide range of clubs and activities as well as visits nearby and abroad. Pupils' conduct is typically exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and welcoming to visitors. There is an atmosphere of calm and order as pupils move between lessons and as they socialise happily in the school's restaurant. As pupils progress through the school they become increasingly reflective individuals confident to debate and discuss issues. Pupils recognise that other people's views, experiences and beliefs can be different to their own. Pupils know the importance of treating all with equal respect and not tolerating prejudice.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted the many strengths of the school, including in leadership, teaching, pupils' achievement and behaviour. One area was identified for specific attention. This was to improve teaching further by increasing opportunities for pupils to really deepen their learning, ensuring that teachers make better use of questioning to this end. Now, where strongest, teaching, including highly effective use of questioning, supports outstanding progress. However, this is not consistently the case across subjects and the most able in particular are not routinely challenged to a high degree. You have rightly identified that stretching the most able and further developing questioning skills are key priorities for further

improvement. Leaders are making sure staff are trained and supported to achieve this.

Leaders are proactive and reflective. You acted swiftly to adapt your approach to assessing and tracking pupils' achievement to meet changed national requirements. Recognising this new approach was too cumbersome, leaders developed something more fit for purpose. This new approach is up and running. However, leaders know there is more to be done to ensure it provides the accurate information leaders and governors need to gain an incisive understanding of pupils' achievement across years and subjects. You have successfully tackled weaknesses in sixth form provision. New leadership in the sixth form has brought significant improvement. Students are making increasingly good progress. Leaders recognise that ensuring that students make consistently strong progress across all the subjects they study is a key next step. You are tackling relative weaknesses in modern foreign languages teaching, ensuring the new leader is supported by a senior leader who leads a high-achieving department. Previous success in this type of approach gives you confidence it will work this time.

Leaders have recently recognised that more needed to be done to ensure that the school's approaches to promoting equality for people protected under the Equality Act 2010 are consistently effective for all protected groups. Leaders have recently received expert training to this end. Training for all staff is scheduled for later this term. The school and trust policy is under review and an audit is underway to establish exactly how well equality is promoted across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Recruitment procedures are sound. Comprehensive training ensures that staff are aware of their duties and the signs to look out for that might indicate a pupil is at risk of harm. They know when and how to refer any concerns to the leader responsible for safeguarding. Leaders work with others agencies when needed to ensure pupils are supported and protected.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have wisely adjusted their approaches to assessing and tracking pupils' progress. They have made it simpler to use at key stage 3 and are ensuring that at key stage 4 it is fully aligned with the requirements of the new GCSEs. However, teachers are still adjusting to these new approaches and understandably it will take some time to ensure they are fully effective. In the meantime, leaders' ability to understand exactly how strong progress is across subjects and year groups is somewhat hampered.
- The trust and the local governing board know the strengths in the school's leadership and have a good grasp of what could be better still. They challenge leaders to ensure areas of relative weakness are tackled. Regular reviews carried out by the trust's director of school improvement help to verify leaders' evaluations of the school's performance.

- Pupils typically achieve well across subjects. Over the last three years, pupils' progress across subjects has been high at the end of key stage 4. Pupils with low and middle starting points make particularly strong progress. Provisional information for 2016 indicates that achievement for these groups was high.
- Where teaching is really strong, teachers use a range of successful strategies to help pupils learn really well. They set suitably challenging tasks. Highly effective questioning and feedback help pupils to reflect deeply on their learning and to know how to improve. Teaching in English exhibits this strong practice. Teaching in mathematics is also effective but not as strong.
- You are attending to some small pockets of relatively weak teaching. Rightly, improving teaching in modern foreign languages is your priority. You are using your tried and tested approach, teaming the new head of department with an experienced and effective leader, thereby ensuring the subject leader and her team are suitably supported in their quest to improve languages teaching.
- The sixth form is improving. Better supervision of students' private study sessions coupled with improved support for those not making good progress have played a key part. In 2014 students' achievement by the end of their academic courses was low. In 2016 it was high and no group of students made poor progress. Achievement in several subjects was also high, whereas previously progress in each subject had in almost all cases been average. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement in some subjects is still quite low and less than half of pupils met their targets in all the subjects they studied in 2016. Additionally, although in recent times most pupils have improved their grade on retaking English GCSE, with many gaining grade C, only about half have improved their grade in mathematics.
- Leaders make effective use of pupil premium funding, providing a range of useful support. Disadvantaged pupils make outstanding progress in English. Progress in mathematics and other subjects is good.
- The most able pupils make good progress across most subjects and make particularly strong progress in English. However, typically these pupils make average progress by the end of key stage 4, whereas progress for other groups is high. Those who join the sixth form with high grades at GCSE make progress in line with the national average for such pupils. However, typically they do not make consistently strong progress across all the A levels they study.
- The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity and equality. Pupils say they learn to respect all, regardless of difference. They are clear that incidents of pupils displaying prejudice and discrimination, including homophobic behaviour, are very rare and not tolerated. Nevertheless, leaders' understanding of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the 2011 public sector equality duty has not been thorough enough. Leaders are remedying this, receiving support and training from The Kent Inclusion Service and Stonewall. Work is now underway to train staff, establish the exact strengths and weaknesses in the school's equality work and tackle the latter.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about special education needs and/or disabilities on its website.

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about their equality objectives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teaching routinely enables the most able to engage in the stretching and deep learning necessary for them to make outstanding progress across subjects
- an increasingly high proportion of students make strong progress across their 16 to 19 study programmes
- the school's work to tackle prejudice and promote equality for people protected under the Equality Act 2010 is consistently highly effective.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your two deputy principals at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included: considering whether students' progress in the sixth form was improving; exploring how well the school meets the needs of the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged; and looking at the quality of leaders' work to promote equality and tackle prejudice and discrimination.

During the day, inspectors held further discussion with you and other senior leaders. I met the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive of the trust. Inspectors visited parts of eight lessons and scrutinised a selection of pupils' work jointly with school leaders. Inspectors listened to pupils read and discussed their reading with them. Inspectors took account of 37 staff survey responses and 134 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors considered 89 parent responses by free text and 60 responses to the pupil survey. One inspector spoke with pupils and staff at lunchtime, another met with a group of Year 13 students. Inspectors analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and procedures.