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Mr Paul Neves
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Dear Mr Neves

Short inspection of John F Kennedy Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Jane Crow, 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 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.

John F Kennedy is a school where pupils, staff and leaders embody the core values of 'inspire', 'achieve' and 'serve'. Pupils arrive happy, behave well, treat one another with thoughtfulness and courtesy and truly appreciate the work of their staff to care for and educate them. Pupils are taught to value, respect and actively celebrate their uniqueness within the school community. One student commented that throughout his time in the school, staff 'lament with us when things are going wrong' and 'they share our joy when we succeed'.

You are diligent in your efforts to develop the community spirit within the school. Pupils speak highly of the numerous opportunities they get to work with those in different year groups, for example during the annual summer whole-school concert. Pupils also speak highly about the wide variety of extra-curricular provision, including drama clubs, art club, chess club, the orchestra and the Gaelic football club and lacrosse teams. One parent particularly emphasised that this provision had really helped her son to 'build his confidence' when he first joined the school.

One of our key lines of enquiry was to look at how you have improved against the areas identified in the previous inspection. Although your staffing has changed since

that inspection, inspection evidence and the school's own monitoring confirm that you have maintained the good quality of teaching and learning in the school. More than this, you and your leaders have worked hard to secure more robust assessment practice. Consequently, leaders and staff have clearer guidance about where pupils could be challenged to achieve more. Subject leaders use the 'one-page summaries' to drill down into where pupils need more support and guidance, and apply appropriate interventions that make a difference to pupils' outcomes. This is more established in key stage 4 currently. Leaders acknowledge that middle leaders' scrutiny of work at key stage 3 does not review the progress of pupils sharply enough to ensure that they are being consistently challenged as much as they could be, particularly some disadvantaged pupils who are capable of achieving more. Staff have trained with local primary colleagues this year to ensure that they have a secure understanding of the raised expectations of pupils at key stage 2 and the level of challenge required for pupils in key stage 3 when they arrive at John F Kennedy.

Thoughtful leadership continues to improve the sixth form steadily. In particular, the level of support that leaders provide for disadvantaged pupils is specific and has a real impact on improving these pupils' outcomes, aspirations and post-18 destinations into future careers, such as medicine. Students experience numerous opportunities to 'serve' others, such as through the volunteering programme, by working in night shelters and charity shops or at the local church youth groups. Leaders ensure that students' work experience is linked to their aspirations and interests. However, leaders have identified that securing high-quality placements for all students remains a consistent challenge.

The majority of parents are very positive about the school and their children's experiences. Parents commented specifically on how well the school supports pupils' personal development, their well-being and their special educational needs and/or disabilities. They appreciate how staff support their children and the Christian values that underpin the positive ethos within the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe and are kept safe. Lesson time, assemblies and visitors teach pupils in an age-appropriate way about safety. This includes information about how to stay safe from drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, cyber bullying and while online. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were confident about how they used this guidance to protect themselves in their everyday lives.

Leaders and governors ensure that all statutory checks are completed on new staff and that the documentation related to staff recruitment is well maintained. Governors have also been active in securing the funding for additional site security work on the fencing and gates around the school. A number of pupils commented to inspectors that this made them feel safe.

Staff are trained in the most up-to-date guidance. They use this guidance to make appropriate referrals to the designated safeguarding leader. The designated leader

uses these referrals to seek the right advice and support from relevant external agencies. Although you record this information in pupils' case files, we did discuss ways that you could sharpen some of the recording of events, so that it is easier for other leaders to both carry out quality assurance and support the designated leader in this role.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes in the school have continued to improve year by year since the previous inspection. In 2014 and 2015, the progress that pupils made by the end of Year 11 was significantly above the national average in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics. This was a significant increase on the outcomes in the school during the previous inspection. Disadvantaged pupils during this period made progress that was broadly in line with the national average, while, for some of these pupils, the differences are diminishing even more rapidly in English and mathematics.
- In 2016, pupils in Year 11 attained well in a broad number of subjects, and the overall progress that pupils made was broadly in line with the national average. However, a significant minority, including some who were disadvantaged, did not have the required balance of subjects to meet the new government measures.
- You acknowledge that this was a decision which leaders took for genuine reasons, but which you have since reviewed. Consequently, you are ensuring that currently almost all pupils are fulfilling the Progress 8 measure and increasing numbers are meeting the English Baccalaureate requirements (both are government measures of achievement).
- One of my lines of enquiry was to review how leaders are securing improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils currently in the school. Leaders and governors were incredibly disappointed with the outcomes in 2016 for disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils had been a key focus for staff in the school for a number of years, and you had previously had much success in supporting them to achieve well.
- You and your team worked quickly to understand why the actions you had taken previously to secure good outcomes for disadvantaged pupils did not work as well in 2016. You identified some very valid reasons for the underachievement of a small group of these pupils who, despite your efforts, were unable to achieve as well as their peers.
- However, you are also very clear that disadvantaged pupils generally in 2016 were capable of more. Therefore, you have further increased the focus on current disadvantaged pupils. Senior and middle leaders are identifying where current pupils need more help to catch up, and are providing one-to-one tuition, in-class support and intervention to enable this improvement. School information and inspection evidence confirm that this is ensuring that current disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 are making better progress.
- As part of this key line of enquiry, we also looked at the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Year teams, alongside the inclusion officer, work hard to support pupils and their parents to improve attendance. While the attendance of

disadvantaged pupils remains lower than the national average, leaders use a broad range of measures, including rewards, and effective work with external agencies to make a real difference to some pupils' attendance. This is especially the case where there are sometimes more challenging circumstances.

- Although leaders throughout the school undertake significant and successful efforts to improve the provision for and outcomes, attendance and aspirations of disadvantaged pupils, leaders do not measure the impact of their collective strategic effectiveness as well as they could. Leaders are currently reviewing how they could do this better with the appointment of a new assistant headteacher in the summer term.
- We also explored the support for the small numbers of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Since her appointment in September 2015, the special educational needs coordinator has used her thorough understanding of the most up-to-date guidance to improve the quality of provision in the school for these pupils. Learning support assistants and teachers are being well supported with specific guidance about the strategies that they should be employing to support pupils' precise needs.
- Leaders and governors review the funding that they receive for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities against their achievement, and make decisions about their curriculum and the quality of the support that they receive. Governors have supported leaders effectively in recent reviews of this provision and associated decisions about staffing and support.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who spoke to inspectors were highly articulate and enthusiastic about their school experience. They say that lessons are good and teachers work hard to help them. Pupils also feel that they learn new things well and that they make friends easily. Pupils say that they are active participants in the school community, with many involved in the extra-curricular opportunities, which gives them confidence to speak to older pupils and to learn new skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders use pupils' work more precisely to ensure that teachers in their areas consistently challenge and guide pupils precisely at key stage 3, particularly those who are disadvantaged, so that they are even better prepared to achieve the highest standards at key stage 4
- senior leaders routinely review their overall impact on improving standards for disadvantaged pupils, in order to measure how effective they are in securing improvements in the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils, compared to other pupils nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the inclusion leader, subject leaders and achievement leaders. We also met with four members of the governing body, including the chair. We visited classrooms with senior leaders and reviewed pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. We spoke with pupils throughout the day, and chose some pupils from Years 8, 9, 10 and the sixth form to speak to formally. We also met with leaders in the sixth form.

We took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 204 parents, as well as 24 staff responses. We also reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to school development planning, self-evaluation, the spending of additional funding related to the pupil premium, alternative provision, safeguarding and pupils' progress.