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9 February 2017

Mr Mark Dumican  
Headteacher  
St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School  
Rookery Avenue  
Ashton-in-Makerfield  
Wigan  
Lancashire  
WN4 9PF

Dear Mr Dumican

### **Short inspection of St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School, Ashton-in-Makerfield**

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2017 with Annette Patterson, 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 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide leadership that is unassuming and unequivocal. Your determination to get things done and improve the quality of education for the pupils is shared by your able leadership team. At no point do leaders settle for second-best and the commitment to continuous improvement is a common and consistent trait of your staff.

The expectations you have for all are unerring. Pupils behave in an impeccable manner and value what the teachers do for them. The pupils I spoke to told me that the 'professional and caring teachers' were the best thing about this school. Staff are overwhelmingly positive and proud to work at St Edmund Arrowsmith. One recent visitor commented that your school has 'restored' her 'faith in education'. Teachers value the support and encouragement they are given to improve their practice. Your own records indicate that teaching is more effective since the last inspection. The continually improving outcomes for pupils support this.

At the last inspection you were asked to develop communication strategies with parents. The very high responses to Parent View and free text and your own parental surveys show that parents have confidence in your leadership and that this school is the right place for their children. Parents told me how 'fortunate' they feel to be able to send their children to this school. Parents particularly value the portal

that they can access at any time to give them an overview of how well their children are progressing and attending. You are realistic and pragmatic in stating that not all parents are happy all of the time but there is no doubt that the well-being of pupils is your prime concern.

Pupils make faster progress than their peers with the same starting points nationally across a range of subjects. Attainment in all subjects is high. However, you know that the progress made by certain groups of pupils is not as good as it should be. This is the case for the most able disadvantaged pupils, pupils of lower ability and pupils receiving support for special educational needs and/or disabilities. Collectively, these groups make up a small number of pupils but you accept that in order for the school to be outstanding such variance within groups cannot exist.

The tracking and analysis of pupils' progress that leaders undertake four times each year is systematic. The rigour with which this is undertaken is inconsistent. Your own information has shown that staff are not routinely held to account for the performance of specific groups within their subject areas.

For a number of years, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been low. The strategies that leaders have put in place are exhaustive but you have been up against a persistent number of pupils who regularly miss school. Rightly so, they remain a priority for you and leaders will leave no stone unturned in their actions to get them back into school.

Your evaluation of why the school is not outstanding is accurate. The strengths are many and considerable of which you and the community ought to be proud. The planning documents that you have in place, however, do not fairly reflect the actions that are being carried out. The lack of sharpness and specificity in these plans impedes governors' effectiveness in holding you to account. It is unclear from the plans what specific actions are to take place and what the impact will be. At times, the foci are too broad and lacking exactitude.

Governors have a clear understanding of where they want the school to be and correctly believe that you have the capacity and mettle to make it happen. Governors' work with departments is commendable and it provides them with an accurate view about the quality of provision within each subject area. Governors are honest in recognising where the school could be even better and share in the constant desire to improve in order to serve the pupils and the local community.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders fulfil their statutory duties with care and attention. Pupils feel safe at this school and the staff are appropriately trained in ensuring that pupils are kept safe. Leaders act quickly to any concerns raised and this same urgency is applied to ensuring that new staff to the school receive up-to-date training. Pupils told me that they feel safe and they are confident that bullying is dealt with quickly. Your records show that you adhere closely to your anti-bullying policy.

## **Inspection findings**

- Pupils make quicker progress than their peers nationally across a range of subjects. Attainment is significantly above average in all subjects. The achievement in humanities and languages is particularly impressive. The progress of current pupils indicates that outcomes for all year groups will continue to be at least as good, if not better.
- The progress made by the most able disadvantaged pupils, the lower attainers and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not as quick as it should be. These are very small cohorts but their underperformance impacts significantly on overall headline figures of how well pupils achieve. Leaders recognise that the rigour with which their performance is addressed is variable.
- Attendance rates overall are high but not for disadvantaged pupils. Current attendance rates reflect this picture. The strategies employed by leaders are comprehensive and appropriate and are beginning to show modest improvements.
- Parental communication is effective. The website is easily accessible and gives a range of pertinent information. The school's portal is valued by parents as a means of communication and parents spoke very highly of the parents' evenings and how professional they find teachers and leaders to be.
- Your own records indicate that teaching is consistently good or better. The outcomes of pupils would support this view but the achievement of the aforementioned groups of pupils lags behind. The work we saw in pupils' books and the information you made available to us supports your evaluation that teaching across subjects and year groups is good.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater consistency in the rigour with which teachers are held to account for the performance of specific groups of pupils
- planning documents are specific in what needs to be done and what will be the impact of these actions.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection we met with you, senior leaders, five members of the governing body and a representative of the archdiocese. With members of your leadership team we conducted a learning walk and visited a range of lessons and had the opportunity to speak to pupils and see their work. We also listened to a number of pupils read. We met with groups of pupils during the day and took account of 182 responses to the pupil questionnaire. There were 287 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, 162 free-text comments and 101 responses to the online staff questionnaire. We scrutinised a range of documentation, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.