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Mr S Adamson
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Adamson

Short inspection of Ursuline College

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2017 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your appointment as executive headteacher in January 2016, which followed several changes of senior leadership personnel shortly before that time, has provided stability and continuity in leadership. You and your leaders, including those in post since the start of this academic year, have sought to provide and sustain the best possible education for each pupil. You are well supported by the staff of the school and a dedicated and strong governing body in your drive to achieve this. Parents are highly positive in their comments. As one said, 'This is a lovely, well-managed and inclusive school.'

You and your staff promote the school's values of 'Serviam' (I will serve) in a positive manner by setting increasingly high levels of expectation and aspiration among the pupils and students in a strongly supportive and well-ordered environment. This is recognised and valued by parents. You have developed an atmosphere where all pupils grow as individuals, and are well prepared for life as responsible members of the community. As another parent said, 'My son is well looked after and has flourished.' All pupils feel very well cared for.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted a number of strengths, including effective leadership, good quality of teaching, a strong sixth form, good behaviour, and the excellent level of care and safety. Inspectors highlighted the need for leaders to improve teaching further through the provision of consistently effective advice and

questioning by teachers so that pupils can improve their work. In addition, other aspects for improvement were to ensure that the tracking and monitoring of pupils' performance are improved, and enhance opportunities for teachers to share best practice in and across departments. You have subsequently taken effective action to address these recommendations.

You acknowledge that outcomes last year in some subjects, notably English and science, as well as the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, were not as strong as you had hoped. You have made appropriate changes to address this situation. Consequently, indications are that this year an improvement in outcomes is likely. You also recognise that improving attendance, in particular for disadvantaged pupils, is a priority for the school. You, your leadership team and your governing body are taking effective action to address this. In addition, you draw on external expertise from Kent Catholic Schools Partnership, as required, to help drive further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a positive culture of safeguarding that runs throughout the school. This is well supported by effective systems that make sure all pupils are secure. Procedures and policies meet statutory requirements.

Your designated safeguarding leader has good support from her deputy. Leaders and governors have been appropriately trained in safer recruitment procedures. Training of staff and governors is both comprehensive and regular. For example, staff that join the school mid-year receive appropriate training as part of their induction programme. In addition, all staff receive regular training regarding any changes to safeguarding practices as they arise, including child protection. Staff know the signs to look out for that may indicate a pupil is at risk of harm, and know what action to take when necessary to support vulnerable children.

Pupils say that they feel very safe in school, and this is strongly supported by the views of parents. Pupils are confident of how to stay safe when using the internet and social media. Instances of bullying are very rare. When they do arise, your staff deal with them swiftly and effectively.

Governors are making an increasingly good contribution by challenging and supporting you and other leaders in ensuring the welfare of your pupils.

Inspection findings

- During the meeting with you 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:
 - the effectiveness of the steps you have taken to improve the quality of English and science teaching

- the extent to which the sixth-form study programme components are met, and the extent to which outcomes in AS- and A-level subjects are improving
 - how rapidly the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving.
- Disadvantaged pupils are typically making better progress because of stronger teaching linked with improvements in tracking and monitoring and the provision of a wide range of support. Leaders have improved the quality of data analysis and information available to staff, which now enables them to plan lessons more effectively to support improvements in attainment for this group of pupils. The use of additional government funding to improve outcomes for this group of pupils has been effective.
- Due to previous weaknesses in teaching, outcomes in English and science have been disappointing. You have addressed these weaknesses well through the appointment of new teachers and focused training within those subjects. You are making sure that pupils in these subjects are provided with as much support as possible to catch up. Evidence from learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work and current assessment data show that achievement in these subjects has improved, but you acknowledge that there is still some way to go. You are using a good variety of effective approaches to make sure that Year 11 pupils are provided with as much support as possible. For example, you have recently changed the timing of the school day and now provide timetabled after-school intervention sessions for Year 11 one day a week. You also recognise that pupils' achievement in languages and geography has been too variable. You have taken appropriate actions to improve the quality of teaching in these subjects through the appointment of new staff and the provision of effective training and support. In addition, the quality of leadership in these subjects has been improved.
- Attendance had been a matter of concern for the school, notably for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Data since September 2016 reveals an improving picture in overall attendance for most groups of pupils. Leaders and staff have worked well together to secure this improvement, for example by using pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils at risk of reduced attendance. Systems for tracking and analysing pupils' attendance are now tighter. The presence of a school attendance officer who liaises with families and undertakes home visits has contributed to this improvement. As a result, the attendance of pupils is better, although disadvantaged pupils' attendance is still not as good as planned.
- Strong leadership of the sixth form ensures that study programme requirements are met. The stable retention rates of pupils from key stage 4, and an increased number of students joining from other schools, reflect the positive reputation of the sixth form. Students are very appreciative of all that your staff do in raising their aspirations. They say they receive a good range of support, including pastoral and careers guidance, and are well prepared for life beyond school. Leaders provide strong support to students as they move on towards higher education and training. This has resulted in an increase in the number of successful applications to universities and apprenticeship courses.

- Leaders recognise that some results for A- and AS-level subjects were disappointing last year. Achievement in several subjects was below national averages in terms of the progress that students made from their starting points. In response to their detailed analysis of performance, leaders have not been afraid to take decisions in the best interests of the students. These include modifying the curriculum, while still offering a broad range of subjects, through reducing the number of level 3 subjects and increasing those at level 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in English and science continues to be developed so that pupils make consistently strong progress
- absence, especially that of disadvantaged pupils, becomes increasingly rare.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the 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

David Powell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your head of school at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas the inspectors would focus on during the inspection. During the day, inspectors held further discussions with you, other senior leaders and staff. I also met with representatives of the governing body, and separately with a representative of the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership.

Inspectors, accompanied by your senior leaders, visited eight lessons. In addition, a selection of pupils' work from different key stages was scrutinised jointly with school leaders. Inspectors took account of 43 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and also considered written comments from 33 parents. There were 33 responses recorded by staff and 72 responses recorded by pupils on the online questionnaires. Inspectors also met with groups of students from Years 12 and 13, and separately with pupils from key stages 3 and 4. We analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour information, and safeguarding policies and procedures.