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Mr Shaun Shields  
Headteacher  
St Cuthbert's RC High School  
Shaw Road  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mr Shields

### **Short inspection of St Cuthbert's RC High School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 2018 with Liz Kelly 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 June 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the previous inspection, there has been a decline in the overall quality of teaching. As a result, pupil progress and attainment at key stage 4 have deteriorated steadily over the last three years. In 2018, the results of national tests showed pupils' progress was well below the national average. The progress of disadvantaged pupils has declined at a faster rate than that of other pupils in the school. Consequently, the difference between the progress made by this group of pupils at the school and other pupils nationally is widening. The proportion of pupils that achieve a standard pass in English and mathematics at GCSE has been below the national average for the last two years.

Overall, pupils' rates of attendance have been in line with the national average for the last three years. However, the proportion of pupils that are regularly absent from school is higher than the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils that are regularly absent is particularly high and shows little sign of improvement.

Following your appointment as headteacher of St Cuthbert's in September 2018, you have quickly and accurately identified the school's weaknesses. Your previous role as deputy headteacher at this school has stood you in good stead and you know the school well. This is enabling you and your leadership team to take action

and emerging improvements can be seen, especially in teaching.

At the time of the last inspection teachers did not always plan learning that allowed pupils to build on their prior knowledge. Following your appointment, you introduced a new assessment process. This is helping teachers to have a better understanding of what pupils can do already and where they need to improve. You have also provided training for staff to improve their practice. As result, many teachers use assessment information accurately to plan learning. They plan learning that builds on what pupils already know. However, there are occasions when this is not the case. Consequently, over time, pupils do make consistently good progress across subjects and year groups.

At the time of the previous inspection, some teachers did not apply leaders' policies appropriately. You have introduced new policies and delivered staff training to ensure that teachers apply these policies consistently. Where this is happening, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, there are still some occasions when teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. As a result, learning lacks challenge and pupils do not take pride in their work.

You have made important changes to the way that pupils choose the subjects that they want to specialise in at GCSE. In the past, staff have not always encouraged pupils to study subjects at key stage 4 that are matched accurately to their needs. Pupils now benefit from improved help and support with their subject choices at key stage 4. This allows them to choose qualifications that are appropriate for their chosen career. However, it is too soon to see what effect this will have on pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 4.

There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school. Staff and pupils smile at those they meet. Pupils are polite and friendly, and they are respectful to each other and to adults in the school. Corridors are busy and purposeful. Pupils move quickly from one lesson to another and they arrive at their lessons promptly and ready to learn.

Staff are positive about the changes that you have already made. They are proud to work at the school. They value the training that they receive. They feel that you consider their well-being. Staff say that pupils are well behaved and safe.

Pupils are happy and confident. They appreciate the help they receive from their teachers. Pupils report that behaviour is much better than it was last year and say that this is because teachers 'are everywhere'. Pupils value opportunities to take on leadership roles. They are confident that you listen to the views of the school council, which is also bringing about change. For example, the menu in the canteen has been changed for the better in response to requests from the school council.

Parents are equally positive about the school. They believe that their children are happy and safe. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, also believe that pupils are taught well, and that behaviour is good. Parents are confident that any rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively.

Governors have learned from the past. They are aware that they have not always held the headteacher to account effectively. They have taken steps to identify gaps in the knowledge and expertise of the governing body. They are using training provided by the local authority and the diocese to develop their skills. As a result, they are increasingly effective in holding leaders to account.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your team have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Processes in place ensure that only adults who are safe to work with pupils are employed at the school. Staff in the school are very well trained and vigilant in their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding leader ensures that staff are aware of any concerns that affect pupils in the local area.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They know who to talk to in school if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils explained to inspectors how important it was to not give out personal information when online. The pupils who spoke to inspectors said that bullying is not an issue, and if it does happen teachers deal with it promptly and well. Pupils understand fundamental British values and explained that these are included in the five core values of the school. They explained that all pupils were welcome at St Cuthbert's school.

You and your leaders know your pupils well. You have increased the strength of the pastoral team to ensure that it can work closely with vulnerable pupils and their families. You have developed a culture of help and support, promptly engaging with outside agencies when necessary. You meet the needs of vulnerable pupils and their families successfully.

### **Inspection findings**

- I wanted to check on the improvement in teaching and learning since the previous inspection. You have introduced a robust system of quality assurance, and you and your leadership team know where teaching is good or better and where it is not as strong. You provide individualised support to teachers, which helps to improve their practice. Teaching is improving. However, there are some teachers who have not improved their practice as quickly as others and where this is the case pupils' progress is slower. As a result, teaching and learning are not consistently good or better across the school.
- We reviewed attendance, as you recognise that attendance is an issue for some of your pupils. You now have two full time attendance officers and you have increased your use of the local authority educational welfare officer to improve pupils' attendance at school. As a result, attendance is improving. However, the proportion of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, that are regularly absent from school remains above the national average.
- We reviewed your behaviour policy because over the last few years the proportion of pupils that have been excluded for a fixed period has increased.

You have introduced a new behaviour policy to improve pupils' behaviour and have ensured that most staff apply the policy consistently. Consequently, staff, parents and pupils report that pupils' behaviour is improving. However, the proportion of pupils that are excluded from school remains higher than the national average.

- Since 2015, the number of permanent exclusions in the school has also been above the national average. You have introduced systems to ensure that pupils can get help quickly to manage their own behaviour. As a result, permanent exclusions have reduced and there are no longer any pupils currently in danger of being excluded permanently.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- improve teaching by ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
- ensure that teachers use assessment information to plan teaching that challenges pupils and builds on their prior learning
- improve outcomes for pupils at key stage 4 across subjects
- improve rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils
- embed the new behaviour policy and reduce the proportion of pupils excluded from school for a fixed period.

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

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors examined a range of documents, including: safeguarding records and policies; information on pupils' attendance, progress and attainment; and leaders' action plans and self-evaluation.

Inspectors met with you and other members of your leadership team. The lead inspector met with the chair and the vice chair of the governing body, the governor with responsibility for safeguarding, and a foundation governor. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority.

Inspectors observed learning with school leaders across subjects and year groups,

and scrutinised work in pupils' books. Inspectors spoke formally with groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 and informally with others around the school. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at social times.

Inspectors considered 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered 10 responses to the free-text service and 62 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.