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Mrs Helen Gill
Headteacher
Maria Fidelis Roman Catholic Convent School FCJ
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Dear Mrs Gill

Short inspection of Maria Fidelis Roman Catholic Convent School FCJ

Following my visit to the school on 23 November 2016 with Sunday Ellis, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

It is an exciting yet challenging time for the school. A new school building is being constructed next to the upper school site and you are looking to grow the size of the sixth form. Boys are now in almost all year groups as the school moves to being fully co-educational. You have shown great resilience during these times and together with governors and other staff, are well prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. The school has also met some difficulties in recruiting the high-quality staff you want to appoint. However, you do not make weak appointments to fill staff vacancies. You have, rightly, made the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff a strategic priority for the coming years.

Leaders at all levels, including governors, have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. You and governors have high expectations and do not shy away from holding staff to account for the impact of the quality of their teaching on pupils' outcomes. Consequently, there is typically good progress for pupils over time in mathematics, English and modern foreign languages. Science outcomes have consistently improved over the last few years. Lower ability and middle-ability pupils make consistently strong progress over time. Typically, prior to 2016, disadvantaged pupils, from their different starting points, made better progress than other pupils nationally.

Your analysis of 2016 provisional outcomes has been thorough. You have recognised that most-able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, underachieved in 2016 and that outcomes in humanities, which had improved in 2015, were below expectations. You have also identified a need for teachers to be more consistent in developing high-quality feedback for pupils. You are aware that not all pupils, including the most able, know how to improve their subject-specific knowledge and skills.

A strength of your leadership is that you use external reviews of curriculum areas where needed, for example, in art and mathematics, which are now leading to more effective teaching. You have a review of geography planned for early December. You have worked hard to continue to share best practice, an area for improvement from the last inspection. Staff, including middle leaders, now regularly visit and work with other schools as well as each other. This is leading to improvement in the quality of teaching and in improving progress for pupils. Middle leaders greatly appreciate the challenge, support and rigour they receive from their line managers.

The sixth form is small yet growing. Progress is improving, both overall and for the subjects that are most popular with students. Attainment at the highest grades improved in 2016. External information that evaluated the quality of teaching over time correctly supported your assertion that this is typically good. You do recognise that there is still a need to improve the progress of the most able students so that they attain the highest grades of which they are capable.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders are aware of the local risks to pupils. Consequently, the school's work in training staff and educating pupils on risks including forced marriage, gang affiliation and e-safety is having an impact. A high proportion of pupils report that they feel safe. In the words of one pupil, 'I feel much more safe in school than outside'. Pupils report that bullying is rare. The school tracks any incidents, including homophobic bullying, carefully. Parents' replies to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, clearly support the fact that they feel that their children are safe and well looked after.

Leaders organise intensive 'theme days' where pupils learn about specific safeguarding topics, such as lesbian, gay and bisexual awareness and e-safety. Pupils report that they find these events useful. Leaders are tenacious in following through quickly where any concerns are reported by staff about the well-being or risk to a pupil. The school's 'warning signs' training about female genital mutilation, radicalisation, honour-based violence, forced marriage and sexual grooming has improved staff knowledge and understanding. As a result, staff are confident about what signs to look for and what to do if they have any concerns.

There are, however, certain policies that are not up to date. This includes the equalities policy. You acknowledge that this should be updated to reflect the current practice of the school. You agreed that there is also a need for more regular educational training for pupils, in an age-appropriate way, on particular topics such as radicalisation and the different forms that it can take.

All recruitment checks on staff meet statutory requirements. Therefore, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- The governing body knows the school extremely well. The quality of information the governors receive, discuss and consider in their decision making is robust. They meet leaders at all levels regularly to review the impact of teaching. For example, they have recently met the head of humanities to discuss pupils' outcomes and what the next steps are to securing improvement. Governors pay particular regard to the safeguarding of pupils, including the most vulnerable pupils that attend the school.
- Your current partnership work with local schools to share best practice and improve teaching demonstrates your willingness to both support, and learn from, others. You are also in discussions with the local authority and other schools about working together on widening sixth-form provision. Middle leaders particularly appreciate external support in helping them to develop their subject delivery, including how to challenge the most able.
- Your regular monitoring of pupils' progress means that you are aware of which groups are underperforming, even where numbers are small. You develop a clear plan of action, including full work scrutinies, which you undertake directly with individual teachers. Consequently, your high expectations and your clear understanding of the quality of teaching over time inform decisions about how to further improve teaching.
- Due to the school's well-above-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils, the number of most-able disadvantaged pupils in each year group often outweighs others. The most able, but particularly the most able disadvantaged, underachieved at the end of key stage 4 in 2016. Assessment information provided by the school shows that this is not the case in key stage 3. As a result of the improvements in the quality of teaching in this key stage, most-able pupils are making more rapid progress. You acknowledge that challenging the most able in their learning is a priority for improvement, including tracking how the pupil premium funding for this group is specifically targeted.
- The most able readers read fluently. Pupils who read aloud to inspectors, read with emotion and paid full regard to punctuation. They report that they read often and are supported in doing so by their parents. The least able readers can break down more complicated words to help them understand their meaning.

- New leadership in the sixth form is already having a positive impact. Sixth-form students are seen as inspirational role models for younger pupils. Leaders ensure that students receive helpful training and support. Students are expected to undertake preparatory reading and/or activities before classes. They attend quiet study periods during the school week and are assigned academic mentors to support them to make the best use of this time. Students report that this routine is helping them to be more responsible, independent and successful sixth formers. It is still too early to see the wider impact of these strategies on final outcomes, particularly for the most able.
- Pupils and their parents are typically positive about the school. They are very confident about staying safe, the school's approach to bullying and ensuring that pupils respect each other. A few of the parents who had a negative comment about the school focused on a lack communication between school and home or the lack of usefulness of the school website. A comment from one parent stated that the parent handbook is out of date. Another parent described the school as a 'remarkable hidden gem in Camden'. You do, however, have plans to improve the website and recognise that this is needed.
- Pupils are typically calm and orderly. They are friendly and polite. Pupils report that behaviour is generally good, although there can be some low-level disruption to learning. Other pupils reported that the school is 'strict'. Attendance is typically above the national average, including in the sixth form. Rates of exclusion, which had decreased steadily, increased last year. This has been due to a small number of incidents of poor behaviour outside school where you have pursued a 'zero-tolerance' approach. You place the safety of pupils first and foremost and will not tolerate pupils endangering themselves or others.
- The school is an inclusive environment where pupils are well cared for and diversity is celebrated. The small number of boys in the sixth form have integrated well into the life of the school. Pupils and sixth-form students typically enjoy school and benefit from a range of different extra-curricular activities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently challenge the most able, including the most able disadvantaged pupils and students in the sixth form, so that they attain the highest grades of which they are capable
- policies and plans that relate to equalities are up to date, so all stakeholders are aware of how the school promotes this aspect of its work in an age-appropriate way.

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 Camden. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sam Hainey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the curriculum and quality of teaching over time
- ensuring that students on 16 to 19 study programmes are making at least good progress
- the impact of the school's strategies to raise attainment for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
- how effectively leaders and governors implement their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and equalities
- ensuring age-appropriate education for pupils in areas such as e-safety and their understanding of relationships in modern Britain.

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, members of the governing body, senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for leadership of the sixth form, to evaluate the impact of the school's work. Other activities included meeting a group of the most able, including disadvantaged most-able pupils, to discuss their views about their learning as well as listening to high- and low-ability readers. There were also meetings with groups of students from the sixth form and pupils from key stage 3.

Learning walks to a variety of subjects and year groups were undertaken, including one with the headteacher. The lead inspector met with the local authority representative.

Inspectors considered 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, 19 responses to the staff questionnaire and 58 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Inspectors also observed and spoke with pupils at break- and lunchtime. Inspectors also considered the school's surveys of parents from different year groups.

Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documentation provided by the school, including: assessment information focusing on the progress of different groups of pupils currently at the school, particularly the most able and those in the sixth form; self-evaluation; improvement plans; minutes of meetings; attendance and behaviour information; the single central record of recruitment checks; and other information relating to the safeguarding of pupils.