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Mrs Niamh Annull
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Annull

Short inspection of Finchley Catholic High School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2018 with Louise Voden, Ofsted Inspector and Katerina Christodoulou, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. From the point of your appointment in September 2017, you have established a clear sense of purpose and direction. Governors, parents and carers, staff and the local authority speak positively about your strong leadership.

Finchley Catholic High School is a welcoming community with positive relationships throughout the school. Morale is high. Members of staff who spoke to inspectors said that they are proud to work at the school. An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, agreed that the school is well led and said that they would recommend the school to another parent. Many commented positively about the high-quality pastoral care the school provides, and said that their child is happy and safe at school.

Pupils acknowledge the strong levels of support, guidance and care they receive and said that they feel highly valued. They are appreciative that staff will go 'the extra mile' to help them beyond their lessons. As a result, pupils have very strong attitudes to learning, enjoy school, attend consistently and behave very well. They are polite and courteous to adults and to each other.

Attainment for pupils at key stage 4 is much higher than the national average, including in English and mathematics. However, in 2017, the most able pupils' progress was below expectations. You and your leaders know that the progress of

most-able pupils needs to improve further, especially in English. You have already put action plans in place to tackle this issue. Current school assessment information indicates improved progress for the most able pupils in Year 10 and Year 11.

At the previous inspection, leaders were charged with improving the rates of progress for pupils in the sixth form. Through strong leadership, effective teaching and assiduous monitoring of students' academic and pastoral progress, outcomes in the sixth form are now well above the national average across a range of subjects.

You, the leadership team and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved further. Since your appointment, you have strengthened the support provided to disadvantaged pupils to ensure that they make the same progress as their peers and that of other pupils nationally. However, you are aware that there is more to be done to accelerate the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership of safeguarding is strong, as is the scrutiny provided by the governing body. Staff are well trained and regularly updated on safeguarding issues, including the 'Prevent' duty. Staff liaise effectively with external agencies and are proactive in referring any concerns to the appropriate professionals. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality.

All pupils that we spoke with during the inspection said that they feel safe in school. They said that bullying is rare and that staff deal swiftly with any that does happen. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, particularly online. Parents agree that their children are safe and happy in the school.

Inspection findings

- We pursued a number of lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. Our first line of enquiry was to consider the progress of the most able pupils.
- Outcomes in 2017 remained high. The proportion of pupils in Year 11 attaining standard pass grades in English and mathematics was well above average. A much higher than average proportion of pupils also attained a higher grade 5 or above. However, these impressive headline figures mask some underachievement, particularly of the most able pupils. In English a proportion of pupils did not make the progress expected of them. As a result, they did not attain the very highest grades.
- Leaders and governors are, rightly, prioritising the progress and attainment of the most able pupils. Inspectors observed the use of skilful questioning by teachers in a number of lessons, including Year 7 English, Year 10 science and Year 12 further maths lessons. As a result, pupils were able to deepen and consolidate their learning and, thus, achieve at greater depth. However, in some lessons, activities planned did not sufficiently challenge pupils, particularly the

most able. Inspectors found that, at times, pupils' work in books lacks depth and expectations for the presentation of work are not consistently high. Opportunities to develop extended writing skills are restricted. As a result, pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable.

- A further key focus for this inspection was to explore the provision for disadvantaged pupils. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils did not make as much progress overall as their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. The school has introduced a range of strategies to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. For example, each disadvantaged pupil is identified, their needs assessed, and funds used to give additional support, as required. Teaching staff are held to account for the outcomes of their disadvantaged pupils.
- School assessment data indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making gains in their learning. Pupils' books show that they are making progress in line with their peers. Nevertheless, leaders know that there is more to do. Sometimes, learning is not structured well enough to provide appropriate challenge. Consequently, the most able disadvantaged pupils do not make consistently strong progress.
- Attendance for pupils overall is above that of their peers nationally. However, in 2016 and 2017 disadvantaged pupils' attendance was below that of other pupils nationally. Since 2017, pastoral leaders have increased their focus on the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. They know their pupils very well and ensure that appropriate intervention and support is put in place. As a result, the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving.
- Our final area of focus during the inspection was the sixth form. Since the last inspection, leaders have prioritised improvements to the sixth form. As a result, the progress students make in the sixth form has improved and is now well above the national average. A high proportion of pupils move on to the school's sixth form after Year 11. Retention rates between Year 12 and Year 13 are high. Leaders and teachers are meticulous in their tracking of students' progress and are quick to provide academic and pastoral support, where necessary. Students value the high-quality teaching. The majority of students move on to appropriate university courses, including Russell Group universities, and some pursue apprenticeships.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers challenge pupils, particularly the most able and most able disadvantaged pupils, so that they make substantial progress and attain higher grades, particularly in English
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met you and your senior leaders, three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. We visited many subject areas with you and your senior leaders to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. We met pupils from every year group. We reviewed records about keeping pupils safe, and about attendance, and examined a wide range of other documentary evidence, including that relating to the school's ongoing monitoring and self-evaluation. We considered the views of 214 responses to Parent View, 136 responses to Ofsted's confidential pupil survey and 71 responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey.