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Mr Philip McCullagh
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McCullagh

Short inspection of The John Fisher School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018 with David Plumeridge, 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 October 2013.

The school continues to be good.

The school's work is underpinned by its lively Christian character, supported by positive values, which are carefully applied. You, your staff and governors show great concern for the well-being of all the boys. Pastoral care is very strong. Pupils are delighted with this. Those we met with commented on a 'happy atmosphere', and that staff 'really understand what you're going through'. One said, 'The teachers are welcoming and friendly, and it creates an atmosphere where you belong; that's for old boys as well.' The pupils really like the traditions of the school, including the high profile given to rugby and music. Attendance is above average. In this positive environment, they achieve well.

The school routinely helps pupils to explore issues facing the nation and world, such as Brexit. During the inspection, it was pleasing to note, in different subjects, pupils addressing important concerns, such as plastic in the oceans, and the definition and causes of terrorism.

Pupils' behaviour is thoughtful and kind. I noticed this first when travelling incognito on the same 127 bus as at least 20 of them, up the hill from Purley station before the school day. These pupils' conduct was exemplary; they showed courtesy and consideration to other passengers and to each other. They made their way promptly from the bus stop to class. During lessons, pupils concentrate well and listen carefully. They work hard and help each other. Around the school they behave safely and are very polite and friendly. A few pupils report occasionally feeling nervous around bigger boys. Serious misbehaviour is rare. Pupils say that any bullying is generally swiftly resolved. Pupils also enjoy taking responsibility. For

instance, some volunteer to be trained as mentors for others.

Middle and senior leaders are thoughtful, proactive and effective in their work. Recently, you have made well-considered changes to the senior leadership structure. These make lines of accountability clearer. The changes have released energy among leaders, and enabled subject leaders to make more impact. You have also worked effectively with governors to improve the challenge they provide, their engagement with the school, and their impact. The reformed governing body is careful to protect and develop the school's traditions, and support the staff, while increasingly showing that it expects further improvement.

You have been largely successful in addressing the recommendations made at the last inspection. However, some inconsistencies in teaching quality over time remain within and between different subjects.

The sixth form is very successful and well led. Most pupils from Year 11 stay on. Students show leadership in the school. They achieve highly at A level. The sixth formers we met explained the high expectations staff have of them, together with the clear feedback and helpful advice they receive. Staff support them in working hard and showing good levels of independence. Students are well prepared for work and further study. Most move on to university, which suits them well. Others go to apprenticeships, which the school appropriately promotes, or find suitable jobs.

Parents and carers who completed the Parent View questionnaire are understandably almost universally positive about the school. One summed up these views as follows: 'A great school that cares about all the boys.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your senior team ensure that staff are regularly and thoroughly trained in the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, which they know well. Adults demonstrate their shared responsibility to keep pupils safe. In turn, the pupils feel secure and very well looked after. They say it is very easy to get help and that they have key points about keeping safe clearly explained to them. Recently, for instance, the school has carried out useful work to show younger pupils what radicalisation is, and how to understand and avoid it.

Staff know clearly what they need to about child protection. The designated safeguarding leads are clear in their roles and are well known to staff. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The safeguarding policy is comprehensive and clear. The school meets statutory requirements. Checks on visitors to the school are carried out with care. The site is secure. Risks are properly assessed, including for pupils' activity online. The school carries out pre-employment checks rigorously, and the single central record is scrupulously maintained. This is to ensure that adults in the school are suitable to work with children.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on how well pupils make progress. My colleague and I explored this in detail. We found that pupils make good progress throughout the school.
- At key stage 3, there is an effective system for evaluating pupils' progress. This has sensible checks and balances, such as systematically comparing teacher assessments with test results. It gives convincing evidence that younger pupils progress well. At key stage 4, pupils also achieve well. GCSE results are consistently above average. Pupils with low attainment from primary school often make particularly strong progress by Year 11. Disadvantaged pupils, entitled to pupil premium support, also achieve well. Nevertheless, you, other leaders and pupils have correctly identified that there are some inconsistencies. For instance, in 2017, pupils did not perform quite as well in some subjects, including English, business, economics and Spanish, as they did in others including mathematics and science.
- The teaching which underpins pupils' progress is good. Pupils report that, for most of the time, classroom lessons challenge them well. Our visits together to classrooms showed that teachers had secure subject knowledge, clarity of purpose, high expectations and gained good responses from the pupils. However, you and I agreed that not all teaching we saw was as strong as the best. In a very few cases, teaching was less precise and inspiring, not engaging the pupils with their learning quite as well.
- You have very recently appointed two members of staff to lead on the development of teaching and learning. They have made a good start, identifying sensible areas to work on, such as increasing the levels of challenge in lessons further.
- The second line of enquiry looked at why pupils seem to achieve better in mathematics than they do in English, by evaluating the work of the respective departments.
- We found that the mathematics department is very well led. Its expert staff work proactively together to develop their practice. The head of department ensures that teachers' training and development closely meets their needs. Chosen teaching strategies are sharply used. In Year 7, for instance, a teacher questioned pupils very expertly so that they checked carefully for themselves how much they understood. The work of the English department, although effective, is not yet as well developed. The subject leader provides purposeful direction, and some improvement is taking place. The department knows how well pupils are doing. But staff have not yet developed strategies to challenge fully all pupils to ensure that they make the same very strong progress over time in English that they do in mathematics.
- The third agreed line of enquiry centred on the curriculum, and the appropriateness of compulsory and optional subjects at the different levels of the school.
- The key stage 3 curriculum is broad and well balanced. You are insistent that pupils have good opportunities to study the humanities, sport and games and

arts subjects. In a Year 8 art lesson for instance, pupils focused well on painting effective pictures related to the sea. Key stage 4 pupils benefit from a wide range of options, including some vocational courses, which meet most of their needs. Some pupils would like more lessons in skills such as money management. Others would like more information about which course and job options might best suit them, especially those that are as one put it, 'obtainable in other ways than just being academically clever'.

- The school is developing its curriculum in religious education. This is important to ensure that the syllabus fully reflects the different faiths represented in modern Britain and the world. The school hopes to see a rise in results at GCSE in this subject, as these have not been as high as they might have been. Pupils who met with inspectors were able to discuss confidently and respectfully key tenets of major religions, including Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, as well as Christianity.
- We looked finally at the impact made by the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plans. I found that the school's formal published self-evaluation is written in over-effusive terms. It emphasises positive factors over less encouraging evidence. The school development plan, however, does address weaker areas suitably. It shows much better the realistic understanding of the school's position that you actually have. However, this plan lacks precise enough objectives, especially those for outcomes for pupils. It is not clear in setting rapid enough timescales for improvement. This leads to some lack of impetus in resolving weaknesses.
- You and your staff are, nevertheless, very thoughtful in the way you address issues facing the school. For example, senior leaders are using research evidence and external expertise to try to make the curriculum better still. You use a gentle and patient style. As we discussed, this steady and reassuring approach leads to sustainable change, and ensures the strong commitment of staff. But it can also mean that some improvements in outcomes for pupils, such as those being worked on in English, do not happen as rapidly as they might.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school self-evaluation is expressed in realistic terms, with relative weaknesses as clearly identified as strengths
- school development planning includes clear, ambitious objectives and timescales for improving further outcomes for pupils, to increase the speed of key improvements
- outcomes for pupils in English rise to be as strong as those currently reached in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The team inspector and I met with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders (including the heads of English and mathematics) and other members of staff. We evaluated documentation, including some from the school's website, such as the school's self-evaluation of its own performance and the school development plan. We also scrutinised information about pupil premium expenditure, policies, records on the progress made by pupils and safeguarding documents. We met with pupils from Years 7 to 11 and sixth-form students. With senior leaders, we visited classrooms across all year groups in the school to gather evidence about our key areas of enquiry and looked at some of the pupils' work. I met with governors, including the vice-chair. I also looked carefully at confidential online questionnaires from 203 pupils, 45 members of staff, and the views of 335 parents who responded on Parent View.