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Dear Sister Brigid Halligan

Short inspection of Bellerive FCJ Catholic College

Following my visit to the school on 5 October 2016 with John Leigh HMI, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is improving because you have ensured that it is well supported with good-quality leaders that have clear lines of responsibility and work well together. You have selected a leadership team that embraces and advocates Catholic values and drives improvements across the school. Consequently, most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been tackled effectively. Since the last inspection you have forged further partnerships with other providers and ensured that leaders are outward looking. This has allowed for leaders to obtain validation of the quality of the school's work and has ensured that swift and timely action is taken towards school improvement. You also ensure that the quality of your work is assured by the local authority and the archdiocese. Consequently, leaders are focused on accurate areas for improvement and the school's evaluation of its own performance is accurate.

Senior leaders and governors have a strong sense of commitment and are striving to further improve the quality of education provided to pupils. Leaders work well together to create a caring community. Pupils are consistently encouraged to value and respect each other and to make the most of their abilities. Leaders recognise the importance of challenging and eradicating discrimination. Pupils within the school have different religious beliefs but work seamlessly together; they have a clear acceptance of other faiths. Equality and tolerance are strong threads throughout the school. All staff uphold the school's mission statement and are keen

to ensure that pupils grow personally and academically. Staff and pupils practise the school's values: excellence, companionship, dignity, justice, hope and gentleness. These values permeate the school and ensure a strong ambience for learning. Staff are keen to ensure that pupils have a clear moral compass and are equipped with the skills to become successful lifelong learners. Pupils are well prepared for their role in a modern global society. Leaders have ensured that pupils are motivated and compassionate. As a result, charity work is extensive within the school throughout the year.

Pupils uphold the school's expectations about good behaviour; they have a clear sense of belonging to Bellerive. They display pride in their work and have good attitudes to their learning. During social times they clearly enjoy spending time together and show good manners and respect for others. Relationships between staff and pupils are good and support pupils' development. Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about their school experiences, as are many parents. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of activities and build new skills. For example, there is a successful and popular Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme in place which enables pupils to make a significant contribution to their community and develop wide-ranging skills and personal responsibility. All staff actively promote the spiritual development of pupils and also their social, moral and cultural development, so they are able to make a positive contribution to British society. This ethos is woven across the curriculum and it shapes the day-to-day lives of all pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have established strong systems to make sure that staff and visitors are vetted to be able to work with pupils. There is a clear focus on keeping pupils safe; procedures are fully in place, with leaders and governors fulfilling their statutory duties effectively. The school's safeguarding policy is clear and informative, reflecting current guidance and requirements. School records show that when staff have cause to act, they have done so in an appropriate and timely manner. Staff engage effectively and appropriately with parents, carers and other stakeholders to make sure that pupils are supported and safe. For example, pupils were able to explain to inspectors about their recent assemblies on staying safe online and the dangers and risks of radicalisation. Leaders have ensured that all staff have been appropriately trained in child protection and safeguarding issues. Consequently, staff and governors are vigilant and well versed in their responsibility to ensure the welfare and safety of all pupils. Staff are also well informed about current national safeguarding issues; they have received training about their responsibilities with regard to female genital mutilation and radicalisation. Pupils know to whom they should turn for support in the event of any concerns. Leaders recognise the complexities of the school site; they ensure that the school site is monitored vigilantly during lessons and at social times. They keep a good check on the entry and exit of pupils.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics dropped in 2015. Leaders have acted swiftly and decisively and attainment in the summer of 2016 showed a much improved picture. Differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of others are reducing quickly.
- In 2016, pupils made good progress in English and mathematics. This is a result of consistently good teaching. The proportion of pupils making strong progress in English and mathematics has risen sharply.
- Leaders have taken clear and effective action to improve the teaching of mathematics across the school. Teaching has been strengthened and leaders use clear and effective strategies to drive up standards. However, current pupils still make slightly better progress in English than they do in mathematics.
- Leaders are taking effective action to diminish the difference between the achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged and that of other pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils made very strong progress in a number of subjects at GCSE level in 2016, including biology, chemistry, English literature, French, history, music and physics.
- Information you provided about pupils currently in the school shows that the positive trend of improvement is on track to continue.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved the English Baccalaureate at the end of key stage 4 in 2016 compares favourably with the national figure.
- Current progress measures used by the school across key stage 3 show that pupils make good progress across a range of subjects. Differences between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils are diminishing.
- Leaders remain focused on improving attendance across the school and use a wide variety of strategies to promote the importance of pupils' attendance. The school has increased its use of an educational welfare officer. This resource is used effectively alongside the work of heads of year to raise the profile and importance of good attendance. There is a consistent message communicated at all levels of the school and community. Form groups compete for the best attendance award; there is a shared responsibility and raised expectations about attendance across the school. Consequently, pupils' overall attendance is now in line with the national average.
- The new head of sixth form has brought stronger systems and checks on academic progress, and students' own work. Her detailed approach is swiftly improving standards and she ensures that no stone goes unturned in identifying any barriers to success. As a result, improvement can already be seen in students' achievements. Students' study programmes are appropriate and success rates are improving for those students who need to re-take mathematics and English GCSEs. In 2016, students' academic A-level performance improved in a number of subjects, such as applied science, biology, English language, English literature, further mathematics, French, geography, history and psychology. However, there is still continued improvement needed to ensure that students' academic subject performance equals the very positive performance of students who take vocational qualifications.

- Leaders have taken effective steps to improve pupils' standard of reading across the school. Pupils with low reading levels receive well-structured and coordinated support to enable them to improve their reading. The new reading recovery programmes are effective in developing and improving pupils' reading. The profile of reading has improved across the school. Leaders are working towards a quality reading accreditation and are keen to continue and develop further effective strategies to improve reading across the school. However, the library is not well stocked with books to interest and excite pupils. Opportunities to stretch the most able readers are not applied consistently across the school. The school is currently without a librarian to support leaders in raising reading standards. Leaders are taking effective steps to support further developments in reading.
- Governors have a strong sense of commitment and are striving to further improve the quality of education available to pupils at the school. They are well informed about pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching and learning. Governors use their plethora of skills to challenge and support the school well. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governing body committees are well organised and attended, and provide an appropriate platform to question impact and hold leaders to account. However, governors have not checked that the school complies with government requirements regarding information that should be published on its website. Curriculum information for parents needs improvement.
- Leaders have ensured that robust and accurate systems are in place to track and monitor pupils' performance at key stage 4. Middle leaders identify pupils who need further help and support and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions in improving pupils' outcomes.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan well-structured lessons that cater for all pupils. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and anticipate their needs so that barriers to learning are removed.
- Improvements to the overall quality of teaching and learning have been at the heart of the school's work since the last inspection. Teachers benefit from regular scheduled professional development opportunities. As a result, information collected by leaders shows that the quality of teaching and learning has improved.
- Parents speak warmly about the school and the efforts of teachers and leaders to ensure that their children thrive and achieve. Some parents commented favourably on the school's ethos and systems on the online questionnaire (Parent View): 'The pastoral care is a real strength of this school. By looking after the child's well-being it enables them to flourish with confidence and achieve their potential,' and 'The school encourages the children to grow and form friendships that bridge religious, economic and social differences and to work well as a team and individuals.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of pupils' library resources is enriched so that a love of reading continues to develop across the school
- differences between disadvantaged pupils' achievement and that of other pupils nationally diminish even further across a wider range of subjects
- the current pace of improvement in the sixth form continues by ensuring that students' academic achievement is just as successful as that in vocational subjects
- the school complies with 'The School Information Regulations 2012' regarding the publication of curriculum content information on the school website.

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

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors undertook 'learning walks' and observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects.
- Meetings took place with you, your senior leaders, middle leaders, an officer from the local authority, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors also spoke by telephone to some parents about the work of the school.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils at break time and around the school to gather views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in some pupils' books in lessons observed during the learning walks.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, records related to attendance, and information relating to pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors took into account 49 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as 24 responses from parents on Ofsted's free-text service. We also considered 19 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 41 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.
- This inspection particularly focused on a number of key questions:
 - Have actions taken by leaders improved pupils' attendance?

- Has the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, improved?
- Have current pupils' outcomes shown improvement since 2015?
- Have actions taken by leaders improved sixth-form students' outcomes?
- Have leaders ensured that reading is strengthened across the school?