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Mrs Alison Burrowes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Burrowes

Short inspection of Thornleigh Salesian College

Following my visit to the school on 15 December 2015 with Dawn Platt 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been tackled effectively. You have firmly established a school that is characterised by ambition and where the individual is cherished. You were the catalyst for improvements that have now become embedded in the life of the school. You have communicated your vision for the future development of the school highly effectively; as a consequence, staff share a unity of purpose and an uncompromising drive for further improvement.

You have been particularly effective in developing the leadership potential of talented teachers. You care passionately about securing improvements to Thornleigh, but also have the generosity of spirit to see that, in nurturing leaders in your school, you are making a strong contribution to the profession as a whole. As you put it so well, during the inspection, 'growing our young teachers is vital; they are the head teachers of the future.'

You have been unremitting in routing any areas of underperformance. Subject leaders are held to account rigorously for their areas of responsibility and 'challenging conversations' are held with anybody who is seen to be letting the side down. As a result, you have eradicated weak leadership and the school is well placed to sustain its trajectory of improvement.

The governing body has been highly influential by supporting senior leaders and yet at the same time challenging the school to improve further. Governors have a very secure grasp of the school's strengths and remaining weaknesses. They exercise their duty of care for all members of the school community with diligence.

Governors recognise the fact that many staff 'go the extra mile' and they appreciate the contribution of Thornleigh's workforce to continuous improvement.

An abiding strength of the school is its concern to nurture the individual. As one parent put it so eloquently: 'Thornleigh...has high expectations of pupils and encourages the all-round development of the children, praising them and rewarding them for their hard work...the teachers really care about their education, both spiritual and academic.'

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders take their responsibilities seriously regarding safeguarding. Staff and governors are highly trained. The vast majority of pupils spoken to during the inspection, and those who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, said that they feel safe in school. The school is highly vigilant in identifying those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to harm and undertakes effective work with such individuals to help them assess risks and keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been consistently high since the previous inspection. Performance in this key indicator dropped very slightly in 2015, but it remains significantly above the national average.
- Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 who took examinations in 2015 made outstanding progress in English and good progress in a range of other subjects, including mathematics. There was also an increase on previous years in the proportion of pupils gaining the top grades of A* and A.
- Pupils' progress in a minority of subjects, such as geography and art, was less strong. Pupils performed particularly poorly in modern foreign languages. This is because there remain some residual effects of weak leadership of this subject in the past that have proved stubbornly difficult to tackle.
- New leadership of the sixth form has galvanised this area of the school and there are clear signs of improvement. Learners who elect to study vocational subjects have consistently made good progress over time. In 2015, learners in Year 12 who took AS level examinations also made good progress. According to information provided by the school, during the inspection, most learners currently in the sixth form are making good progress.
- However, weaknesses in the sixth form in the past have taken some time to be addressed and worked through. Learners in Year 13, who took A level examinations in 2015 had not made good progress. Furthermore,

there was considerable variability in performance across different subjects.

- There are robust systems in place to make sure that the information the school has on pupils' progress is reliable. The school works effectively in partnership with other local schools to verify the accuracy of such information.
- School leaders go over pupil progress information meticulously, casting a watchful eye to spot any potential weaknesses. Particularly striking is the emphasis placed on the progress of individual pupils. Senior leaders challenge subject leaders in the following way: 'Don't give us percentages, give us names!' There is a clear expectation that, when pupils fall behind, swift remedial action is taken to get them back on track. As a result, all indicators point to further improvements in pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- There has been a strong trend of improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4. In 2015, disadvantaged pupils who took GCSE examinations made much better progress in English than other pupils nationally and made progress in mathematics that was broadly in line with others nationally. The gap between the achievement of these pupils and others is much narrower than nationally. Nevertheless, a small group of these pupils are persistently absent from school and therefore do not benefit from the many worthwhile opportunities that this school provides.
- Pupils with special educational needs and disabled pupils generally all make good progress from their individual starting points. The school recognises the need to support even more effectively the small proportion of such pupils who do not attend school on a regular basis.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching is rigorous. Intensive support is provided when teaching is judged by school leaders to require improvement. The school has worked effectively on the areas for improvement regarding teaching, identified at the previous inspection, and many opportunities are now provided for staff to learn from each other and share good practice.
- School leaders engage well with parents; this was reflected in the overwhelmingly positive responses, both to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and those submitted as free-text during the inspection.
- Pupils spoken to during the inspection beamed proudly when they explained how well their school is regarded in the local community. They were unanimous that they would wholeheartedly recommend this school to their peers.
- This is a school where diversity is celebrated and all pupils, whatever challenges they may face, are encouraged to aim high. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well and they are taught to appreciate fundamental British values. For example, during the inspection, pupils enthusiastically described how, at the time of the general election, they had invented their own political parties and enjoyed convincing their classmates to get involved and vote.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the sixth form further by embedding current initiatives, ensuring that all underperformance is quickly spotted and appropriate steps are taken to get learners back on track
- eradicate all remaining underperformance in modern foreign languages, geography and art
- reduce further the persistent absenteeism of a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and disabled pupils.

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 Bolton Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a number of lessons, some of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the senior leadership team, subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and pupils. A telephone conversation was also conducted with a representative of the Diocese of Salford.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation of its work; information on pupils' and learners' progress; analyses of examination performance; information on attendance; records relating to behaviour management; reviews of the effectiveness of the school produced by the local authority and an educational consultant and a number of policies, particularly those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the 121 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and also the free-text responses that were received during the inspection. Inspectors also took into account the 109 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 68 responses to that addressed to staff.
- A telephone call was made to the Lighthouse Group that provides alternative education to a very small group of pupils to discuss their behaviour, attendance and progress.