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Miss Bernadette Jenkinson
Headteacher
St Gerard's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Miss Jenkinson

Short inspection of St Gerard's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 March 2016, 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.

You are capable, passionate and steeped in improving outcomes for St Gerard's pupils. You are respected by staff, governors and parents and lead the school community with conviction. You demonstrate a thorough understanding of the school context and the community you serve and are adamant that all children should do as well as they possibly can. Parents express much satisfaction with the work of the school. One parent expressed this well: 'The headteacher is a breath of fresh air. She sees potential in everybody and everything and her love for the children and her job, is refreshing to see.'

You are well supported by middle leaders who are sharing the load and driving improvements in their subject areas. The leaders of mathematics and literacy have secure subject knowledge and are supporting and developing ably other staff. Together, you and your staff have successfully addressed the area for improvement from the last inspection, to improve teaching and attainment in mathematics. The leader of mathematics is a specialist teacher of mathematics who has a vision of how mathematics should look at St Gerard's. The curriculum for mathematics is now more practical and creative. Consequently, attainment in mathematics has increased and there are no gaps between the attainment of boys and girls, or disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

The leader of literacy has a good overview of attainment throughout school. He is an advocate for purposeful writing and has secure subject knowledge, leading by example. With the support of local authority consultants, he has led professional development sessions to help all staff to improve their teaching of English, focusing on particular aspects so that the teaching of grammar and reading has improved. The impact of this work can now be seen in books: pupils are writing pieces of better quality and quantity, and presentation is much improved. As a result of work done to promote more frequent reading, pupils are using their knowledge of texts to inform their writing. However, boys are not currently achieving as well as girls in writing and the most-able pupils are not demonstrating sufficiently high levels to indicate that they are making more than expected progress. Feedback to pupils is variable across school and pupils are not consistently improving their work as a result.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have recently updated the safeguarding policy, reflecting the latest government guidance. All staff have received basic awareness training to help them identify child protection issues and training to help prevent pupils from being at risk of radicalisation. You attend termly safeguarding updates provided by the local authority and take necessary steps to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- Leaders ensure that frequent and effective performance management of teachers is helping all to improve their practice. Middle leaders are very able and are supporting you very effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The impact of their work can be seen on improved attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Governors are very knowledgeable about the work of the school and challenge and support school leaders appropriately. Governors support your ambition and fully appreciate the efforts you have made to improve teaching and learning.
- Leaders work closely with the partnership of schools in the academy trust and with the local authority to moderate pupils' work and to reflect on teaching. However, reports from the diocese do not indicate how effective the school is, and do not offer significant support or identify areas for improvement that will help the school to move forward.
- Effective teaching throughout school is leading to good outcomes for pupils. Teachers are using the curriculum in an inventive way to ensure pupils learn through a range of stimulating topics. Thoughtful planning is underpinning teaching that, for the most part, is challenging pupils and ensuring they enjoy their learning.

- Teaching assistants are highly effective in their work to support learning. This is particularly the case during the teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make), reading and writing sessions for younger pupils.
- Leaders and teachers work together to identify those pupils who they feel are capable of achieving more. Staff put on several extra-curricular lessons designed to challenge pupils further. These include extra tuition in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, a small number of Year 6 pupils achieved very high levels in reading and mathematics last year. Homework is helping pupils to practise basic skills in reading and in mathematics, through online programmes as well as through more formal homework.
- Leaders track the progress of all pupils individually. Last year, disadvantaged pupils achieved in line with other pupils nationally by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. However, disadvantaged pupils did not reach the higher levels. School assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are making progress in line with others in school this year. Current data give no cause for concern, because of the emphasis on tracking the progress of individuals. This shows pupils make good progress, but data are not analysed to see if there are patterns emerging in the progress of different groups. As a result, it is difficult to analyse precise reasons why a group of pupils is underachieving.
- Many children arrive at school with levels of development and skills below those typical for their age. Despite this, outcomes for Reception are improving and progress is good. Last year, the proportion of children who achieved the expected level was in line with the national average. Disadvantaged children achieved better levels than others. Teachers are aware of the need to support boys to improve their writing in particular, but activities planned are not having sufficient impact in helping boys to settle down to learning quickly, or to develop the skills they need to become confident writers. As a consequence, girls are leaving the Reception class more prepared than boys for Year 1.
- Pupils generally behave well and are kind to one another. Incidents of poor behaviour are carefully logged and patterns identified. Parents are kept informed when incidents occur. Pupils say they feel safe and are happy in school. Regular teaching about aspects of safety, including when using the internet and learning with the 'Crucial Crew' about issues around drugs misuse or 'stranger danger', is helping pupils to keep safe when outside school. Attendance is currently in line with the national average, and persistent absence is well below national figures.
- By Year 6, pupils display a good understanding of, and preparedness for, life in modern Britain. Experience of the school council helps pupils to understand the democratic process. 'Enterprise' weeks, where pupils have been involved in making things to raise money for others, have helped pupils to understand how they can help those less fortunate than themselves.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems enable leaders to check the progress of all groups of learners as well as individuals
- the teaching of writing continues to improve, including the quality of feedback, so that all pupils, including boys and the most able, reach the high levels of which they are capable
- routines in Reception class are quickly established to support children's readiness for learning and to maximise their opportunity to develop skills that underpin writing.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Academy Board, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Hallam, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection I was able to discuss the work of the school with you and your staff. We visited all classrooms together to observe teaching and learning. I was able to look at pupils' work in books and to speak with pupils throughout the day. Discussions with a representative of the local authority and four members of the governing body helped to provide additional information. School documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website were also taken into account. I looked at the online questionnaire (Parent View) to gather 23 parents' views about the school and took into account the views of one member of staff through the online questionnaire.