

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 January 2017

Mr David Hird
Headteacher
St Gerard's RC Junior and Infant School
Yatesbury Avenue
Castle Vale
Birmingham
West Midlands
B35 6LB

Dear Mr Hird

Short inspection of St Gerard's RC Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your deputy head, ably supported by the senior leadership team, have a thorough and accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Leaders at all levels, including governors, constantly seek ways in which the school can improve. Where weaknesses are identified, effective remedial action is quickly taken. You keep a close check on what difference actions are making to the quality of education, adapting the plan if necessary to achieve maximum impact. For example, you responded swiftly to the dip in the results of last year's Year 1 phonics screening check. You put in place an emergency programme which ensured the pupils rapidly caught up. This was followed by a root-and-branch review of how phonics is taught in your school. You provided appropriate training for staff and redoubled your efforts to keep track of how well pupils are progressing. The result of this measured approach is that, in a short time, the quality of phonics teaching has improved and pupils are now learning their sounds well.

Other leaders follow your example. The leader of the early years uses forensic analysis of assessment information to skilfully adapt provision as required in order to speed up children's progress. Senior leaders responsible for English and mathematics are similarly well informed about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject. They are driving improvements in these subjects by

providing effective advice and support for teachers.

You have continued to focus on the area for improvement identified at the last inspection. The improvements have included providing more opportunities for pupils to review their own and each other's work. Pupils now receive clear guidance on what should be included in each piece of work. From a very young age, they learn how to assess whether the requirements are met, initially in their own work then moving on to commenting on a partner's work as they get older. Teachers now accurately assess what pupils can do and use this information to plan work at the right level for pupils' different abilities.

You have developed a dynamic and meaningful curriculum. One of the strengths of this is the wealth of visits and experience days which capture pupils' imagination and set a context for their work. Pupils also experience a varied programme of additional enrichment activities, including outdoor activities, music, bird-watching and keeping fit. You review what is on offer annually, making changes as necessary to fit the needs of each cohort of pupils.

The school's values and ethos contribute significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You have increased the time devoted to helping pupils appreciate other faiths. Assemblies, visiting speakers and inter-school activities provide opportunities to mix with people from different backgrounds. You plan to include a focus on deepening pupils' empathy with people from different cultures in your next annual review of the curriculum.

The school has recently begun to work with other schools and the Birmingham Education Partnership on a peer-review and support programme. Your staff appreciate the benefits of this networking. Similarly, there is much for other schools to gain from working with St Gerard's.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, staff and governors are committed to keeping pupils safe. Staff are trained to a high level in all aspects of safeguarding. Policies are implemented rigorously. You ensure that safeguarding is frequently discussed at staff and governor meetings. Concerns are identified, recorded and followed up in a timely way. Thorough checks are made when appointing new staff, governors and volunteers. All checks on visitors are suitably vigilant.

Staff and governors regularly assess any risk regarding the school premises and all school activities. Action is taken swiftly wherever necessary. Pupils know the dangers of sharing personal information online and the dangers of communicating with strangers. Through assemblies, visiting speakers and the personal, social and health education programme, pupils learn how to live safe and healthy lifestyles.

Inspection findings

- The leader of the early years has a detailed picture of each child's strengths and needs. Teachers plan carefully to build on children's growing skills and to help them overcome difficulties. Effective use of ongoing assessment helps teachers shape provision for the whole cohort and to support individuals where needed. As a result, the dip seen in children's outcomes in 2015 has been reversed. Children are now making rapid progress across all areas of learning. Analysis of your data shows no discernible differences between groups of children.
- Pupils are taught to write from a very early age. Children in the Nursery were observed having a go at writing simple words using their phonic knowledge. They are learning to hold a pen and form their letters correctly.
- Children's learning journeys in the Reception show these foundations are rapidly built upon. Children of all abilities have made good progress since September. The most able are writing simple sentences and using their phonics to make sensible attempts at spelling longer words.
- As a result of your decisive response to the downturn in phonics results last year, pupils made up the lost ground by the end of Year 1. Even the least able readers in Year 2 can now use phonics to tackle unfamiliar words when they read.
- Teachers in key stage 1 are now more confident in assessing pupils' work and identifying where it shows they are working at greater depth. Therefore, you predict that next year's standard assessments will more accurately reflect the high standard of work seen in books during the inspection.
- The most recent published data for Year 6 pupils does not accurately reflect the progress made by some of the most able. This is because the system groups pupils according to the average score they achieved across reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1, rather than their score in separate subjects.
- Rigorous tracking of pupils' writing ability by senior leaders shows that most pupils are currently making at least the progress expected of them. The proportion making greater progress is increasing as a result of teachers' improved use of assessment information. Visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' books during the inspection confirm this picture to be accurate. Pupils write effectively for a range of purposes. Their writing is of equally high quality in all subjects.
- Pupils enjoy reading. The school has high expectations that pupils will read regularly at school and at home and will reflect on what they have read. All pupils keep reading diaries. These show pupils read a wide range of books.
- The most able readers in Year 2 can read fluently and with some expression, although they do not always fully understand what they have read.
- Year 6 pupils read with fluency. The most able readers read with engaging expression which demonstrates their understanding of the text.

- Less-able Year 6 pupils read aloud accurately, but are less fluent. This is because they are less skilled at quickly absorbing the meaning of what they are reading. You have correctly identified that pupils across the school need to be taught to infer meaning that is not explicit in the text.
- A strong focus on helping pupils apply reasoning in mathematics is having an impact on standards. Lesson observations and school records show this proficiency is improving for pupils of all abilities across the school and for different groups of pupils. For example, disadvantaged pupils perform as well as their classmates.
- Teaching helps pupils to become independent, self-motivated learners. They behave exceptionally well in lessons. Even the very youngest in the Nursery concentrate for impressive periods of time when practising writing letters. Older pupils participate effectively in collaborative tasks, learning from each other as they do so. You have identified within your school development plan that you aim to build upon these qualities by developing teachers' ability to challenge pupils at greater depth across the whole curriculum in order to further raise standards in all subjects.
- The attendance officer is persistent in pursuit of high attendance. All absence is carefully monitored and followed up. You and your staff take whatever action is necessary to support and, where needed, compel parents to bring their children to school regularly. This has worked for all but a very small minority of families.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers build upon their developing skills in providing greater challenge to ensure that pupils develop a high degree of understanding across all subjects
- pupils acquire the sophisticated reading skills necessary to deduce information from texts and to infer meaning where this is not explicit.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, two governors, including the chair, and the district lead from the Birmingham Education Partnership. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons and to parents as they brought their children to school. I looked at the responses to the Parent View survey and the survey of staff views. We visited lessons together. I heard four pupils read and looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of school policies, including those for safeguarding and child protection. The inspection focused particularly on the progress and achievement of the most able pupils in writing; how well pupils read; how well pupils achieve in key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics; the effectiveness of the early years provision; and pupils' rates of attendance.