

St Gerard's RC Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103458
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308328
Inspection date	14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Hazel Callaghan

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Knight
Headteacher	David Hird
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2004
School address	Yatesbury Avenue Castle Vale Birmingham B35 6LB
Telephone number	01214 642613
Fax number	01214 644542

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues. • The current standards and rates of progress within the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, especially of boys, particularly in writing. • Where the strengths in provision lie and their impact on ensuring all pupils achieve well. • The effectiveness of school's leadership and management systems in ensuring outstanding progress is replicated each year. Evidence was gathered from the school's assessments of pupils' standards and progress and an analysis of the results of the 2007 tests. There were observations of teaching and discussions took place with senior leaders, staff, governors and pupils. Parents' responses to the Ofsted questionnaire were also analysed. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Gerard's draws its pupils from the local area and across the diocese. Whilst the majority of its pupils are from families of White British backgrounds, about a quarter of the pupils come for a variety of minority ethnic groups. This year, for the first time, a small but significant number of children entered the Nursery in the early stages of speaking English. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, but the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Gerard's is a good school. It continues to develop from strength to strength and has many outstanding features. The strong Catholic ethos that pervades all sections of the school's work securely underpins the excellent care provided for pupils and their outstanding spiritual, moral and social development. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and many wrote to explain why they think it is a 'fantastic school'. At the top of the list is how much pupils enjoy coming to school and their thorough enjoyment of learning. One child told the inspector, 'We have fun because my teacher says you have to enjoy school and be happy before you can learn, and I agree.' In this supportive environment, pupils achieve well. Some pupils make outstanding progress, as was seen by the test results in 2007 for pupils in Year 6. Standards are above average, especially in English, mathematics and science. This is a significant improvement on the standards and progress of the previous year. Attendance is similar to the national average.

Good progress starts in the Nursery and grows steadily across the school, the result of consistently good teaching that not only matches work well to pupils' needs but gives pupils a very good understanding of how they can improve. Teachers have high expectations and pupils respond very well to the challenges provided. Parents recognise the hard work of teachers and one parent's comment is typical of many: 'St Gerard's has always had high expectations and lives up to them well.' The many strategies for supporting pupils in their different stages of learning are extremely well planned and monitored to ensure they are working well, especially for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learning mentor plays an important role in supporting pupils and families who are having difficulties. This year, there are children in the early stages of learning English and the school has responded well to the challenge of providing support for several different home languages. The school recognises that this situation is likely to be a continuing challenge in the future.

The curriculum meets pupils' learning needs extremely well. It is fun and stimulating and enriched by a wide range of additional activities and after-school clubs. The curriculum is very well focused on developing pupils' personal and social development. They gain a good understanding of how to develop healthy lifestyles and have a very 'down-to-earth' approach to keeping safe. They have a secure understanding of such issues as Internet safety. Pupils' attitudes to learning are extremely good and pupils behave well. They take on responsibility willingly and are proud of their successes. The school council, for example, feels that its job is to make the school even better and members confidently talk about how they are organising lunchtime games so everyone can have a fair share. The ECO Club has also had a profound impact on the way all pupils react positively to recycling and 'green issues'. Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of learning and the world of work. The curriculum is good in the Foundation Stage but lacks a cohesiveness and consistency that is apparent in older classes because teachers do not regularly plan the curriculum together.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a clear focus on raising standards further and the school sets challenging targets for its pupils' progress. He is well supported by the deputy headteacher and together they have led the comprehensive and accurate review of the school's effectiveness. The headteacher is engaging staff in reviewing all aspects of their work with the common goal of making St Gerard's 'the best'. New systems for checking pupils' standards and progress are working well and both the headteacher and deputy headteacher accurately analyse the data to form a clear view of pupils' achievement,

especially in the older classes. The system of recording provides information on the different groups of pupils but these data take time to collate and, at present, the tracking does not securely cover the youngest classes. Systems are developing in the Foundation Stage but are not yet providing a clear overview of children's progress across Nursery and Reception and into Year 1.

The capacity for further improvement is good. There is already a very good track record of raising standards and pupils' achievement, as well as a really strong sense of teamwork amongst staff. There were many comments from staff and parents about the part played by those in the school office in making the school function well, and one of the governors commented on the extended family ethos that pervades the school, giving it as the reason for much of its success. Links with parents, the local church and many outside agencies are really strong and this also supports pupils' good progress. Governors are well informed and they also play an important part in evaluating the school's effectiveness, so supporting its continuing successes.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start in the Nursery with different abilities and a significant number of children have a narrower range of skills and experiences than is expected for their age. When they begin school, the personal and social development and language skills of many children are lower than expected. Children get a good start in the Nursery and over their time in the Foundation Stage they achieve well. Children make good progress in developing their personal care and independence, and are prepared well for learning. Despite these advances, many children do not attain the standards expected in language, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development by the time they enter Year 1. Standards in mathematical and physical development, however, are broadly average. Children's personal development is supported well by all staff and children are given many opportunities to make their own choices and to learn through their independent play. Activities led by adults are effective in developing basic skills of literacy and numeracy so that children's enjoyment of learning increases steadily. Planning in each class is thorough but not enough time is given to ensuring that there is systematic development of the curriculum across the Foundation Stage so that children's knowledge and skills are consistently developed. The lack of a clear overview of children's progress and consistent planning means the leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are only satisfactory. Systems for checking children's learning are improving but they are not yet complete.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that planning provides a consistent and systematic development of skills and knowledge across the Foundation Stage.
- Track and analyse pupils' progress consistently from Nursery to Year 6.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Gerard's RC Junior and Infant School, Castle Vale B35 6LB

Thank you for making me so welcome and answering my questions when I visited your school. You are rightly proud of your school and what it does for you. You and your parents are correct in thinking that you go to a good school that has lots of outstanding features. Here are some of the things I found out about you and your school.

- You make good progress and you reach standards that are higher than in many schools.
- Your behaviour is good. You are polite, friendly and helpful to everyone. You understand how to keep yourselves safe and are prepared well for secondary school.
- You clearly enjoy your lessons and often have lots of fun. You work hard and want to do well.
- You are taught well and your teachers work hard to make sure that your lessons are interesting and that you understand how you can get better in your work
- The headteacher leads the school well and the staff work as an effective team.
- All the staff look after you extremely well so you feel safe and happy.
- You have lots of interesting things to do, including many visits and additional activities.

Even though St Gerard's is a good school, there are some ways in which it can do better. I have particularly asked the headteacher and governors to do two things.

- Ensure teachers in the Nursery and Reception classes plan together regularly so there is a secure overview of how they develop your skills, knowledge and experiences.
- Make sure that they check your progress from when you start in Nursery right through to the time you leave in Year 6. Thank you again for making me feel so welcome and don't forget you can help to make the school an even better place by continuing to work hard.

Best wishes

Hazel Callaghan Lead inspector

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Hazel Callaghan
Lead inspector