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28 September 2018

Mr Karl Landrum
Headteacher
St Gerard's Catholic Primary and Nursery School
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Dear Mr Landrum

Short inspection of St Gerard's Catholic Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 2018, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the school has built on its previous strengths. There have been improvements to the school buildings and to the arrangements for making sure that the site is secure. New leaders have been appointed to the senior leadership team. Working with governors, you carefully ensured that the skills and experience of your new senior colleagues matched the needs of the school and its pupils. In turn, this has meant that the senior team has been very successful in ensuring that the school is well organised and grows in its effectiveness.

The school's life reflects its widely shared mission statement: 'Guided by God, St Gerard's Catholic Primary and Nursery School is an inspiring and aspirational community where we learn to love, hope, dream and achieve.' These principles are seen across the school's activities and shape the very positive ways people relate to each other. It is clear that leaders and other members of staff are driven by the belief that pupils deserve the best possible education and care. One example of this is the way in which leaders ensure that the school's curriculum is designed to

provide classroom learning and other activities to fill any gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and experiences. The success of this approach is reflected in the inspiring displays of pupils' work around the school's corridors. One of these was created as artwork in a project with a visiting artist. It arose from topic work about Britain and is formed of fish. A key feature is that all the similar, but different, fish are swimming in the same direction.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than in many schools. However, staff do not use this as an excuse to reduce the school's expectations. In fact, the reverse is true. They expect more so that pupils catch up with those in other schools.

You have an honest and accurate view of the school's strengths and the things which can be developed further. In particular, leaders' careful analysis of how well pupils learn has shown that boys could still do more to reach the highest possible standards in their writing. In addition, you know that you can refine the curriculum further to give it even more impact.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified that the quality of teaching could be further improved, particularly in key stage 1. You have ensured that teaching strategies work well by carefully monitoring what teachers and pupils do. This allows you to provide advice and training for teachers. In addition, if pupils are at risk of falling behind, the school has a systematic approach to providing extra teaching focused on any weaker aspects.

The parents and carers I spoke with, and nearly all those who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's survey for parents, praised the staff and the way the school helps their children to learn and develop. Similarly, the responses to Ofsted's survey for staff were very positive. Staff have confidence in leaders and their morale is high.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that arrangements to safeguard pupils are suitable. The safeguarding and child protection policy was updated ready for the start of this school year and reflects the recent changes in national guidance. Four leaders have received specialist training on the safeguarding of pupils. All staff receive regular training and other updates to give them the knowledge and confidence they need. When action is needed to safeguard pupils, this is taken rapidly and is carefully recorded. The school has strong links with other agencies involved in making sure that pupils are properly protected.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the security arrangements for the school have been improved. For example, electronic locks have been installed on access points to the site and buildings.

Pupils say that they feel safe when they are at school. They identify that there is no real bullying and that, if pupils have any fallings-out, they have the confidence to talk to their teachers. They say that any issues are quickly resolved by staff.

Inspection findings

- There are considerable strengths in leadership. Senior leaders work closely as a team and provide clear direction to the school. The recent changes to senior and middle leadership have helped you to build on and speed up improvement, for example in the early years. The school is systematic in using the skills of middle leaders. People new to subject leadership roles receive training to ensure that they can confidently contribute to the success of their areas. This training for new middle leaders this year has already been arranged but not completed. Middle leaders share responsibility for the curriculum and quality of teaching in their areas. In addition, governors add to the school's understanding of how well it is doing through their links with classes and subjects and their challenge to leaders at all levels in the school.
- The school has thorough systems for collecting and analysing data about how well pupils achieve. Staff use the picture from their analysis as the starting point for detailed reviews of pupils' performance. However, they also have a much wider view of pupils' broader development because they know them so well. Pupils are very successful over their time at the school. Progress up to the end of Year 6 is stronger than that found in many schools. However, this does not make leaders and teachers complacent. For example, the school has renewed its strategies to ensure that boys do even better in writing. Sustained progress is also found in other parts of the school. In the past, children left the early years with development that showed they were improving in their skills but more slowly than seen nationally. Since the previous inspection, children's levels of development have increased year by year. In 2018, the proportion of children reaching the good level of development, needed to make the transition into Year 1 as straightforward as possible, roughly matched the national average. This represents substantial progress from the children's typically low or very low starting points.
- Leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching in the school. This area was identified as needing improvement at the last inspection and they have addressed it well. Your judgement is that teaching is effective across the school and this is supported by inspection evidence. I saw pupils responding very well to the teaching provided. Teachers and teaching assistants use their knowledge of pupils to match the work carefully to their needs. Pupils enjoy learning and, as a consequence, try hard and behave very well in class. This positive picture is confirmed by longer-term review by the school improvement partner and the local authority.
- Despite some small increases, attendance in the school remains below the national average. Leaders make the importance of good attendance very clear to pupils and their families. The school celebrates pupils' good attendance with certificates and prizes, and staff challenge poor attendance. Pupils know that, if they are away from school for an unknown reason, their family will receive a telephone call from the school. Where there are cases of longer-term unacceptable absence, the school works closely with the local authority to ensure that parents understand their responsibilities. When all other steps have not led to improved attendance, leaders are prepared to use the legal processes

available to them to ensure that pupils' attendance improves.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to develop their strategies to further raise boys' achievement in writing, particularly when they are completing more challenging tasks
- they further refine the curriculum, including by continuing to develop the skills, confidence and impact of new subject leaders.

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 Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the senior assistant headteacher and other leaders to discuss the school's effectiveness. I had discussions with a group of governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative of the local authority and with the school's improvement partner. I met with a group of pupils and talked with others around the school, during lessons and at breaktime. I toured the school with you and visited the early years. I had a discussion with the assistant headteacher, who is also the early years leader. I observed teaching and learning in classes across the school. I made short visits to the breakfast and after-school clubs. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' books. I examined documents, including information about the safeguarding of pupils, the school's self-evaluation document, minutes of meetings of the governing body and information about pupils' achievement. I considered 17 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including nine additional written responses. I spoke with some parents at the start of the school day. I reviewed 14 responses from members of staff to their online questionnaire.