



### Rotherham Charter Gold

29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Dear Bernie, Anne, Debbie and everyone at St. Gerard's,

It is with great pleasure that we are able to confirm that your status as a Charter school remains firmly secure and, once again, we are reaccrediting you with Rotherham Charter Gold. Members of the Rotherham Charter team visited school on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021. They met with pupils and parents before being treated to a wonderful film showcasing your highlights since the start of lockdown. Who would have thought so much fun could be had over such a difficult period? St. Gerard's epitomised its claim 'When the world stayed apart, we stayed together'. The immense effort staff put in to ensure that families knew they remained held in mind and pupils didn't miss out on life and certain rites of childhood passage is mind blowing. In the words of one child, **"It is amazing how hard the teachers worked."** Parents echoed this by telling us how SGTV, St. Gerard's very own TV channel, and the Zoom lessons, helped bring families together: **"I thank all my lucky stars I had them through lockdown"..."Someone must have been watching over me to send her here"..."They've been a life line for me."** We heard the phrases 'above and beyond' and 'going the extra mile' over and over again. Parents choked up as they tried to express their gratitude for everything staff do. In trying to unpick what is at the heart of your success though, it is the word 'love' that features highest and, after lockdown, the importance of this fundamental ethos that underpins everything you do could not be clearer, **"She [Mrs Baxter] loved them back into school."**

From the start of your journey back in January 2012, to being first awarded Charter Gold in June 2014, you have consistently shown that the Charter principles remain high priority. Parents feel really listened to and, every time we visit, we experience this too. Staff not only have a genuine interest, but they take the time to listen and the care and attention that is shown to each and every family is outstanding. When parents are struggling emotionally this is spotted. Love showers forth in abundance and support is personalised to whatever that family needs, **"Staff know every single name and every personal detail that's going on with a child."** And, whilst it is acknowledged that many of the staff have their own children or other young relatives there, it is not possible to discern who is family and who is not, St. Gerard's literally is one big family. One parent we spoke to was third generation and many of the staff are ex-pupils themselves. Yet newcomers are welcomed and integrated seamlessly into not just the school, but the community, to the extent that the bonds never break, **"I don't think I'll leave after my child has left here."**

Parents appreciate the confidence and trust that school has in them and, to this end, there is a strong group of parent helpers who go out of their way and work tirelessly in the background to bring extra magic to St. Gerard's. One particular example that



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springs to mind is the covert 'Operation Reindeer' scheme which culminated in the spectacular Winter Wonderland event that took place last Christmas, an **"out of this world"** extravaganza with no expense spared that not only compensated for the prospect of a Christmas in lockdown but exceeded everyone's wildest imagination. Santa came with his reindeer, the staff dressed as elves and Mrs Angel's costume of course spoke for itself! While toasting marshmallows, stronger and brilliant new friendships were forged and parents were keen to tell us how proud they were to be able to show off their school, **"It blows me away"..."It's everything I wished I'd had as a child."**

The children really do look after each other. The phrase 'we love each other' is not scripted or just rhetoric. It shines through, modelled by staff who display an **"energy and warmth"** that is **"extraordinary."** Whilst we expected to hear tales from the children of all the special events school lay on over the course of the year, and they did gush about the two key stage nativities, captured on DVD for parents, what they were desperate to tell us was the motivation behind lots of the activities that take place. Fundraising is a key feature, where families, local and on the other side of the world, are cared for and, although fun, the children wanted to make it known that the Zumbathon was held to raise money so that they could buy supplies for the foodbank. Parents love that this civic mindedness is instilled in and taught to their children, **"It's so unique."**

Equally, school prides itself on its inclusivity. Parents feel that this is understated and should be celebrated more. We heard about the way in which St. Gerard's fights for its families and helps take away the worry, **"No problem is ever too big"..."I knew from the start, this is going to be more than fine"..."The immense relief I feel."** Mrs Baxter explains, **"It is really important for our children to know that everyone is different. We're proud that we are a completely mixed bag, just like the real world...because that's what life's about"** And it is that philosophy that cements and makes St. Gerard's one cohesive family, a place where empathy is guaranteed, and tears and laughter are shared. And what we see as key to this, and what keeps you going, is your good humour. Laughter rings through the corridors. No letter of celebration would be complete either without a mention here for the much loved and humorous Mr Drury; your energy is tangible and infectious.

As well as looking out for others, children love that their voice is heard, and their views are not only taken into account but acted upon. The school council is responsible for creating real change and, since we last visited, monies raised have been used to install amazing new play equipment on both yards as well as a shelter for the Key Stage One children on the little yard. Obviously use of the outdoors has been essential to helping navigate lockdown and St. Gerard's has embraced its resources to the full. Where activities could be undertaken safely outdoors staff have ensured this has happened





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and, whilst doing so, they have made sure that children's health and wellbeing has been maintained by offering plenty of additional opportunities for exercise. Working in partnership with parents and jointly funded by McDonald's, the school garden has also benefitted from a complete makeover too. Wellbeing is taken seriously, and staff wellbeing is no exception, wreath making and the exercise club being just two examples of recent initiatives designed to help promote this. Staff love their job and make it known that they are here to stay.

To finish, we just want to share some more quotes with you from very happy parents who wish to make it known how much you mean to them and the impact you have had on their lives:

- *"I was Irish dancing around my kitchen. I just loved it."*
- *"I know she's held and safe. She just thrives here."*
- *"It's not just my child, it's every child."*
- *"They amplify the goodness."*
- *"There's not enough stars for this school."*

Thank you very much indeed for making us feel so welcome and allowing us to witness your brilliance in action once again; you gave us both goose bumps! One parent said that you always find the gold in children. Well, today we saw the gold in you, and, with that, we are delighted to be able to award you **Rotherham Charter Gold**. Well done St. Gerard's Catholic Primary School. You sent 'bags of joy' to all your children over lockdown. You reap what you sow. Please take this time to take stock of what you have achieved and celebrate!

Kind regards

Lisa Morris & Jayne Fitzgerald

**The Genuine Partnerships/Rotherham Charter Team**

