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Miss J Bradley  
Holy Cross Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Miss Bradley

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 November 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please could you also extend my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the representative of the local authority (LA) and the pupils with whom I met.

As a result of the inspection on 11-12 November 2008, the school was asked to raise standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 1, improve the proportion of good quality teaching and learning, particularly in relation to the level of challenge provided for pupils, and to improve attendance.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made

inadequate progress in making improvements.

and

inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

In 2009, results at Key Stage 1 declined significantly in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' overall attainment and that in each of these subjects were well below average. No pupil achieved the higher Level 3 in any subject. The sharpest fall was in writing, where no pupil attained the highest grade at Level 2. Consequently, the school has not succeeded in reversing the declining trend in attainment at Key Stage 1. In the national assessments at Key Stage 2, overall results also declined sharply and were well below average. Standards in science fell markedly, as did those in mathematics, where fewer than half of pupils gained the expected Level 4. However, results improved in English. Pupils' attainment rose to be just below average and the proportion of pupils gaining the higher Level 5 was broadly average. These improvements were partly due to the school's participation in a local authority programme which focused on improving provision in English. Some discontinuity in staffing and some weaknesses in the Year 6 cohort have contributed to this decline in pupils' attainment. Although most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress, the overall progress made by all pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 deteriorated in 2009 and was well below average. The progress made by pupils in lessons observed during the monitoring visit was satisfactory overall.

The school has made slow progress in raising the quality of teaching. It remains satisfactory and while there is some good teaching, there is also some that is inadequate. Some measures have been taken to enable staff to observe good practice that exists within the school. However, teachers have not yet had the opportunity to view good and outstanding teaching in other settings. The senior leadership team monitors lessons through observations and learning walks and provides written feedback for staff. These procedures are not rigorous enough and do not focus sharply enough on improving classroom management skills and the progress made by pupils. In lessons observed, relationships between adults and pupils were generally good and there is a greater match of work to pupils' different abilities. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory overall, and occasionally outstanding. The pace of teaching and learning remains satisfactory. Several factors contribute to this. The skills of additional adults, whilst well used in some lessons, are not fully exploited in others. This means that teachers sometimes undertake tasks that distract them from teaching. Time is not always well used as some learning activities are too long, which leads to pupils becoming bored and distracted. Expectations by teachers of how pupils should behave, and of the amount of work they must complete, are not yet high enough. In some lessons, these are not spelt out clearly or firmly enough before pupils begin their work. As a result, too often pupils, who are asked to work independently, display little sense of urgency in completing their work. Some inappropriate behaviour is allowed to go unchecked for too long and this distracts other learners. Teachers do not always check that learners fully understand the nature of their tasks and the highest standards of presentation in written work are not always insisted upon. Some planning is too brief and does not identify clearly enough how work is to be matched to pupils' different abilities. Where teaching was good, it was fast paced, expectations of behaviour were clearly spelt out and pupils were very clear about what they had to do.

Data provided by the school show that improvements in attendance prior to the last inspection have not been sustained in 2008-9. To some extent, this was caused by a small group of persistent absentees. The school has developed its good links with the local authority's education welfare service and has held a joint punctuality week and introduced certificates and stickers for good attendance. Reminder letters have been sent to parents of those with poor attendance and meetings have been held with some parents to discuss how their child's attendance can be improved. Since the beginning of this academic year, the school has rightly adopted a more robust approach to recording unauthorised absences. The school's data indicates some improvement in attendance since then, but it is still too low. There is scope to ensure that measures to improve attendance are strengthened. The punctuality of pupils remains an issue for the school. The school has yet to identify and communicate to parents a formal cut-off point in the mornings whereby pupils who arrive after this are no longer recorded as merely late.

The improvement of the school is currently heavily dependent on the support provided by the local authority and as such it has not made sufficient progress in developing its own capacity to improve. The school's assessment of the quality of teaching remains too generous. As yet, there is no discrete action plan that focuses on addressing issues identified at the last inspection. The school's development plan is too general and does not specify proposed actions in sufficient detail or indicate milestones by which the success of its actions can be judged. An annual programme for monitoring teaching and learning has been drawn up, but this would benefit from being linked to a programme of specific actions by the school to improve teaching and learning.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy  
Her Majesty's Inspector