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11 June 2009

Mr Lawrence Bentley  
Headteacher  
The Holy Family Catholic School  
Spring Gardens Lane  
Keighley  
West Yorkshire  
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Dear Mr Bentley

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 June 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like to thank the two governors who came to see me, and all the staff and students who gave me their time and help and made me feel very welcome throughout the day.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Your appointment as headteacher in September 2008 is one of the significant changes to the school in the past year. Your partnership with the local authority has developed and helped the school to identify and secure support as needed. The school is now a part of the Department for Children Schools and Families 'Gaining Ground' initiative, to promote further improvement.

As a result of the inspection on 9 and 10 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in core subjects, especially in English
- increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons
- ensure that information on students' performance is used consistently and effectively to meet challenging targets
- ensure that subject leaders are equipped with the skills to implement actions for improvement and eradicate underperformance.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Standards are now broadly in line with national averages, according to the school's own tracking of students' progress, and are continuing to improve. The number of students who are predicted to gain five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics in this year's examinations has increased. The tracking of students' progress is increasingly refined and robust and is used at all levels of the school, from senior leadership team to faculty leaders and students to support the school's aim of improving progress for all students. The senior leadership team has provided strong, focussed leadership and vision. It has ensured that all members of staff contribute to the school's improvement work by involving them at all stages of the school's development.

The school uses the data collected to set challenging targets and raise expectations across the school. The analysis of data allows the school to identify any individuals or groups of students who are at risk of underachievement and put appropriate interventions in place to tackle this. The recent introduction of external marking systems for mock examinations and systems for internal moderation of assessments have resulted in an increasing reliability in the school's tracking systems. The data systems are used to analyse the work of any group of pupils and to assess the progress they are making. The data is also used to monitor the effectiveness of particular interventions made by the school. A recent example of this is the data analysis provided to demonstrate the rapid progress made by students who were identified as being at risk of disaffection and were enrolled on the 'Shooting for Stars' programme. The school's data, based on robust and well-evidenced assessment procedures, indicate that standards have risen significantly this year. The evidence provided during the visit shows that the school is closing the gap on, or exceeding, its challenging targets.

Faculty leaders are now using the data very effectively to monitor outcomes in their areas of responsibility. Discussion with faculty leaders demonstrated their very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within their departments. Assessments are now standardised within departments and across the school, through effective liaison with the senior leader who has responsibility for the subject area. Staff training has improved the competence of all staff to record data and use it effectively to inform their teaching. The accountability of middle managers has been given much stronger emphasis and all faculty leaders now account for the progress of all students in their subject area. Teachers are more accountable for the progress that individual students make in their lessons. They are expected to identify any underachievement and to be proactive in providing appropriate interventions. This ensures that there is corporate responsibility for monitoring the progress of individual students, and groups of students, to identify any potential underachievement and to intervene appropriately.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is in line with the school's ambitious target for improvement. The accuracy of the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning has been consistently confirmed by joint observations with external consultants and school improvement officers from the local authority. It was borne out by inspection evidence. This improvement is the result of using the outcomes of observations to provide a menu of well-tailored support which teachers are expected to access to develop their skills and move their teaching on to the next level. Teachers know the needs of the students well and are now more skilful at planning effectively to meet these. They increasingly use a variety of methods to provide appropriate tasks matched to the levels and needs of all learners. In some cases, pupils demonstrate a lack of willingness to take an active role in their learning and the school is working to tackle this. Nevertheless, standards are rising and greater progress is evident within lessons than at the time of the previous inspection. Students know their targets in all subjects and know how to improve their work in most. They value the recent improvements in the school and say that work is more focussed and structured. They agree that there is more consistency across the school.

Leaders and managers at all levels demonstrate rigour and determination to drive forward improvement in all aspects of the school's work and they are supported effectively by other staff and students. This determination has resulted in good progress in all the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. The governors are active participants in the life of the school and provide effective and well considered, appropriate support and challenge to the headteacher.

The school's modern foreign language (MFL) specialism has had a significant impact on other areas of the school. The standards in MFL have consistently been significantly higher than the national averages. Where there was a slight dip in examination passes in Spanish last year, the school has acted rapidly and effectively to bring about improvement. The outstanding teaching which has been identified in this area has been used to raise awareness of how to improve teaching in all subjects. There are also links with departments throughout the school to provide support, assertive mentoring and coaching as appropriate. The school has developed a range of partnerships with other schools, locally, across the UK and abroad, through the specialism and all subject departments now have an international aspect to their curriculum as a direct result. These aspects of the school's work contribute outstandingly to community cohesion. The school has achieved the international schools award for the third time due to its high quality work in this area.

The local authority (LA) statement of action is clear and has been discussed with the school so that the plans are coherent and relevant to the school's context. Extensive support has been suitably focussed on the areas for improvement and a range of consultants have worked with the school to promote improvement. Reviews by LA staff and the School Improvement Partner provide regular robust challenge and a clear commentary on the progress that the school is making.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

David Muir  
Her Majesty's Inspector