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Maria Wheeler
Headteacher
St Francis Catholic Primary School
Whyteleafe Road
Caterham
CR3 5ED

Dear Mrs Wheeler

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Francis Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to ensure that the school's improvement plan:

- sets out clearly, specific actions to be taken by staff, leaders and governors in relation to each area for improvement
- includes information about the training and support that will be provided for staff and governors, by whom and when
- includes clear information about how progress will be checked and success measured, including by governors
- makes improvement in pupils' progress the key measure of success.

The local authority should take further action to ensure that all support provided to the school is led by the requirements of the school's improvement plan.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the acting assistant headteacher, with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative of the local authority. I toured the school and met informally with the teaching team. I evaluated the school improvement plan and governing body records. I considered records of local authority support, recent staff meetings and staff development days. I examined the school's record of staff employment checks.

Context

The two interim headteachers left the school in the summer, along with the previous acting headteacher who had been absent for an extended period due to ill health. A new headteacher started at the school in September, moving from an outstanding Catholic primary school in London. Three new teachers, including two newly qualified staff (NQTs) joined the school in September and a teacher returned from maternity leave. All pupils are now taught in single-age classes except for one mixed Year 4/5 class. From September 2014 the school's admission number has been confirmed as 60 pupils for each year group. Governors are planning to recruit a permanent deputy headteacher to start in January.

Main findings

You have rightly set out from the start to establish your authority as leader of the school. In presentations to staff and governors, and in assembly, you have made clear your ambitious vision for the school and that you intend to lead rapid and determined improvement. You have already raised expectations for the way pupils record their work and for teachers' marking, following up by checking pupils' books after the first two days of term.

Wisely, you are consulting with teachers on key changes to their practice and you discussed marking policy in the first staff meeting of the term. Teachers commented to me that they value this approach which gives them clear leadership and a voice in the improvement of the school. You have already planned a series of purposeful staff meetings on relevant topics for the rest of this term.

You have introduced a helpful system for recording, checking and analysing pupils' progress. You provided effective training for all staff and governors in this system on the first staff development day. In the Reception Year you have introduced an appropriate workbook, so that right from the start the youngest pupils can record their learning in their own way. As a result, it is now much easier for everyone who needs to, to see the progress of all the school's pupils. Teachers are enthusiastic about this new system and the way they will be able to use the information it

provides. One teacher commented that the pupils' progress "is the responsibility of all of us".

You have set out a comprehensive timetable for key activities this term. This includes lesson observations when you will check the quality of teaching and others when teachers will observe one another to share ideas. Dates are also shown for checks of pupils' books, for governors' meetings with subject leaders, for your own meetings with staff about the progress of their pupils, and for local authority visits. This means that everyone knows what support and challenge to expect this term and can plan to make best use of these opportunities. The timetable also includes a helpful survey of pupils' views about their learning.

To steer the school's improvement, you have provided an outline school action plan. However, the plan covers too broad a range of activities including premises and information and communications technology development. As a result, the key priorities identified by the inspector in June are crowded out. The plan lacks enough detail about the precise actions to be taken by staff at all levels and about training and support. It is also unclear exactly how governors will check progress and measure success.

The governing body is keen to support the school. The chair and vice-chair are committed and work hard; they know the school well and are determined to support you in leading it to become a good school as soon as possible. Governors wisely discussed the inspection report with staff shortly after publication to support morale, and held a helpful meeting with parents.

An external governing body review is booked for later this term. Governors acted promptly after the inspection to conduct a useful internal audit, checking the knowledge and skills shared by the group. Governors also considered how they can make better use of their time in school, scheduling a series of purposeful visits, with the first conducted promptly after the inspection. Firmer links have been established between governors and subject leaders.

Arrangements are in place for the new headteacher's performance management. Governors have recently undergone relevant training about using pupil progress information to inform judgements about the effectiveness of leaders and teachers, and decisions about teachers' salary progression.

External Support

The findings of the inspection confirmed the local authority's earlier advice to the school about the need for improvement. Wide ranging, helpful support and challenge has been provided by the local authority since January 2014 at no charge to the school. This includes relevant training for staff and focussed advice to leaders. This

support is planned to continue, but it is not tied in well enough to the school's improvement plan. A local authority consultant has worked with the mathematics subject leader to devise a relevant action plan. However, the plan does not refer, as it should, to checking for an effect on pupils' progress when measuring success.

The local authority commissioned the external review of governance, which will be led by a suitable person. A routine audit of the school's safeguarding procedures and practices is planned for later in the school year.

The Diocese provided vital support by arranging the deployment of two experienced Catholic headteachers to lead the school for the spring and summer terms. The Diocese is working closely with the school to recruit a suitable deputy headteacher.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Surrey and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton.

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector