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22 June 2021

Catherine Hunt  
Headteacher  
St Francis Catholic Primary School  
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Somerset  
BS48 4PD

Dear Mrs Hunt

**Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit with Karl Sampson, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 8 and 9 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2020. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.**

**The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.**

**The school's action plans are fit for purpose.**

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Clifton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 June 2021**

### **Context**

One class teacher has returned from maternity leave.

In February 2021, at the additional monitoring inspection, inspectors judged that safeguarding was effective.

### **The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation**

Leaders are beginning to tackle the school's weaknesses with greater confidence and rigour. As the school's leadership team is small, the external support provided by the mentor headteacher has been instrumental in enabling this progress. The governing body are also playing their part. A new committee structure enables governors to be much more well informed. They know the priorities for improvement and the challenges that leaders are facing. As a result, governors are well placed to check that you are implementing the school's action plans to secure further improvement.

You have sustained improvements to safeguarding. There is now an even stronger culture of vigilance. Staff report concerns promptly and in appropriate detail. Leaders are piecing information together to help them gain a wider and more detailed understanding of the welfare of vulnerable pupils. They take prompt and suitable action, involving other professionals appropriately, to address any concerns. The governor responsible for safeguarding makes regular checks to ensure that staff understand procedures and that leaders' actions are in line with the school's policy.

Low-level disruption in the classroom is no longer a concern. Teachers now set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and pupils follow these. In lessons, pupils listen carefully and take greater responsibility for their learning. Pupils say that they are now able to concentrate on their work and that this has made learning 'much easier and better'.

Rightly, leaders have started to focus more on developing the curriculum. In mathematics, work is further advanced than in other subjects. The mathematics leader has taken the next steps to build a strong programme of learning. She has set out clearly the knowledge that pupils should learn in each year group in a new calculations policy. Pupils' work shows that they are working towards ambitious goals and that teachers provide them with plenty of opportunities to practise. Consequently, pupils know and remember more in mathematics.

In English, leaders have recently introduced new plans to develop pupils' writing, including their spelling, grammar and punctuation. There is now a clear sequence of learning in place for pupils to help them to know and remember more as they move

from Year 1 to Year 6. Teachers have implemented these plans. The older pupils are using their improved grammatical knowledge to write effectively.

The science leader has taken important first steps to improve pupils' learning. She has ensured that pupils have regular science lessons and that the content of the national curriculum is taught in a logical sequence across the school. She rightly recognises the need to identify the essential knowledge in science that pupils must know and remember in each year group.

Curriculum planning and development in other subjects are at an early stage. Leaders have not yet set out their aims for the curriculum as a whole. They have not identified the essential learning in each subject, apart from mathematics and science, in every year group. It is also not clear how pupils will build and remember this knowledge as they move through the school.

Leaders are providing teachers with some helpful professional development. Teachers are positive about the support and training that they receive. However, there has not yet been enough attention paid to ensuring that teachers build a strong knowledge of all the subjects that they teach.

The curriculum for early reading is piecemeal. Teachers use a range of approaches to teach phonics. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can learn in phonics are not high enough. Lessons do not help pupils to know more and remember more. Teachers do not demonstrate expert subject knowledge. Reading books do match the sounds that pupils are learning well enough.

Although leaders are keen to promote a love of reading across the school, the curriculum is not providing pupils with sufficient interesting, challenging and inspirational texts. Nevertheless, leaders have set the expectation that all pupils will read fluently. Teachers are checking that pupils across the school have sufficient phonics knowledge. Leaders are using catch up funding to support these pupils to make gains in this vital and essential learning.

### **Additional support**

Leaders appreciate greatly the support from an outstanding school. This has provided them with a mentor headteacher and advice on the curriculum. You value the mentor's secure understanding of the school's priorities and the pace of support that is enabling steady improvement. The mathematics leader has taken advantage of the help from an expert subject leader. This has led to positive, key changes, such as the new calculation policy.

Governors and external partners all recognise that because there are few leaders currently in place, the school is very reliant on this help. The emergency funding that provided the support from the outstanding school is due to end in December 2021. The local authority provided temporary funding for the acting deputy

headteacher role. There are currently no plans in place from January 2022. Leaders need continued access to high-quality support or additional, experienced leaders to sustain the pace of improvement.

The diocese continues to work closely with the school and check the progress that leaders are making. The local authority is working alongside the diocese and the regional schools commissioner to plan for the school's future. However, the local authority has not produced a statement of action that sets out this aim formally.

### **Evidence**

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, the mathematics and science leaders and five governors. We met with the mentor headteacher, a representative of the Diocese of Clifton and the director of children's services from the local authority. We also met with six pupils.