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Mrs Helen Taylor
Executive Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Subject inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 19 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. The findings do not change the overall effectiveness judgement of outstanding from the last section 5 inspection.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for a no formal designation inspection of schools. The inspection was carried out to enable Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to better understand the quality of education in specific subjects provided by outstanding primary schools. In this visit I looked at the quality of education in history.

Main findings

You and other leaders are in the process of revising the history curriculum as part of a wider development of the curriculum. You recognise that in the past there has been some narrowing of the curriculum to focus on literacy and numeracy. This meant, for example, that history was often seen as a vehicle for promoting writing rather than a discipline in its own right. You are determined to correct this and have taken concrete steps to do so, such as appointing a new curriculum leader who is a history specialist and revising your curriculum planning.

Where it works well, the history curriculum is clearly sequenced and pays close attention to the order in which knowledge is taught, so that pupils' historical understanding develops securely. In Year 2, for example, pupils can use their prior knowledge to put objects into chronological order and classify them. Pupils in Year 4 know when, how and why the Anglo-Saxons settled in Britain.

Teachers have established some meaningful and effective links across the curriculum. For example, when pupils in Year 4 study the Anglo-Saxons, they also read 'Beowulf' as a class text in their English lessons. This allows the history and English curriculums to support each other while not losing their disciplinary distinctiveness. Similarly, Year 5 read 'Number the Stars' and Anne Frank's diary at the same time as they are studying the Second World War in history. Year 6 read 'Street Child' when studying the Victorian workhouse. Pupils find these links exciting and that they help them develop their historical understanding further.

When the curriculum is less effectively sequenced, this confuses pupils, and they do not build secure knowledge over time. Year 6 pupils, for example, do not have a good grasp of the changes that took place in crime and punishment over time. It is also often not clear how the learning in a specific topic supports learning in the next one or how one year prepares pupils for the next.

At a more fundamental level, leaders and teachers do not have a clear, shared and articulated view about what it means for a pupil to make progress in history and how assessment can support that progress. Teachers are enthusiastic advocates for history and strive to make the subject interesting and engaging for pupils. In turn, pupils enjoy history lessons and the trips they go on. However, the focus of teaching is largely on developing substantive knowledge. So, while the national curriculum is covered in terms of subject content, less attention is given to the disciplinary knowledge outlined in the national curriculum's purpose and aims. This can mean that some of the activities chosen for pupils are not focused closely enough on developing pupils' understanding of history as a discipline.

Evidence

I met with senior leaders and the curriculum leader for history. We then visited lessons and conducted work scrutinies together. I also held discussions with a group of pupils and a group of teachers. As part of the deep dive, I looked at documents relating to the school's planning for the history curriculum.

Context

St Joseph's is a one-form entry primary school with a Nursery. It has 260 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals has risen in recent years and is now close to the national average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language are lower than the national averages but increasing. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan or who receive additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector