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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Mr Mark Owen
Headteacher
Gillespie Primary School
Gillespie Road
London
N5 1LH

Dear Mr Owen

Subject inspection of Gillespie Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 January 2020, 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.

Main findings

You and your staff have ensured that the school's curriculum covers all of the periods in history set out in the national curriculum. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the past are enriched through regular visits to places of historical interest. In Year 3, for example, pupils' learning about life in prehistoric Britain is enhanced by their visit to a Stone Age re-enactment camp. Pupils also learn about the past through visits to the school by amateurs. For example, Year 2 pupils learn about the causes and impact of the Great Fire of London by looking at maps and artefacts from the 17th century. Pupils visit the British Museum in Year 3, 4 and 5 to see first-hand, artefacts from the ancient world and from the Anglo-Saxon and Viking periods. Staff ensure that pupils make the most of these visits by preparing them thoroughly for the visits. For example, pupils in Year 1 learn the differences between pirates and privateers in preparation for their visit to see The Golden Hinde.

Your ambition to deepen further pupils' understanding of local history is reflected in the school's work with the new 'resident historian'. Building on the success of your work with a 'resident scientist', you have engaged a local historian to help staff find ways to teach pupils more about the history of the local community. This approach is already serving to deepen the knowledge and expertise of the teachers.

You and your staff also make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive their full entitlement in history. The work I looked at showed how staff skilfully make work accessible for pupils with even the most complex needs. As a result, everyone is included regardless of any barriers to learning.

Work to ensure that the history curriculum fully reflects the ambition of the national curriculum is underway. In September 2019, an experienced middle leader took on responsibility for leading history. Building on the strengths already in place, she has brought greater coherence to the curriculum by working with staff to ensure that lessons are sequenced appropriately. Staff are beginning to deploy strategies to help pupils remember more of what they have learned previously. For example, curriculum plans make clear how each new topic should be introduced in the context of what has previously been learned. Linked to this, the subject leader has worked with teachers to identify how pupils' subject-specific vocabulary should grow as they move through the school. Curriculum planning now also sets out how teachers can deepen and broaden pupils' historical knowledge, by highlighting opportunities to note connections, contrasts and trends over time. There remains work to do to deepen these aspects of pupils' knowledge, however. Currently, pupils are not given enough opportunities to demonstrate in a sustained way their understanding of these and other concepts such as causation and significance.

Teachers ensure that pupils develop secure knowledge of the order in which past events happened. Pupils' books show they regularly complete timelines to place new learning in its wider historical context. Occasionally, these activities are a little restrictive, with pupils required to simply copy chunks of text onto their timelines. Pupils in Year 1 are helped to understand how long ago Sir Francis Drake was alive by counting back in generations with their teacher. They were able to tell me how many great, great grandparents ago it was since he was born.

Through visits and the taught curriculum, pupils develop good understanding of how historians find out about the past. In Year 6, for example, pupils interrogate different types of evidence to draw their own conclusions about the past. This enriches their disciplinary knowledge in history as well as their sense of period. Pupils learn to use historical evidence to answer well-crafted questions about the past, such as: 'What does the workhouse reveal about Victorian attitudes towards the poor?' Ambitious historical questions such as these are not seen enough in the other year groups, however. Your subject leader knows this aspect of the curriculum needs to be strengthened so that pupils gain experience in answering, and sometimes asking, the types of questions that historians ask.

Evidence

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the subject leader for history. I visited the Reception class, Year 1, Year 5 and Year 6. I looked at pupils' work from these and other classes. I met with teachers and groups of pupils from Year 1 and Years 5 and 6. I looked at the school improvement plan and curriculum planning in history.

Context

Gillespie Primary School is a one-form entry school with a Nursery. Although the proportion of pupils with SEND who receive school support is broadly average, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector