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Mr Simon Tabbner
Headteacher
Silkstone Common Junior and Infant School
Moorend Lane
Silkstone Common
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South Yorkshire
S75 4QT

Dear Mr Tabbner

Subject inspection of Silkstone Common Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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

Pupils learn geography during weekly 'QI' lessons, commonly known as topic afternoons. During this time, pupils explore wide-ranging questions such as 'Why does it matter where my food comes from?' or 'How does the weather affect our lives?' Pupils enjoy 'QI' time. The structure and content of these lessons ensure that pupils can apply their geographical knowledge to many other subjects or situations. This is because the published resources and plans teachers use focus heavily on cross-curricular links. However, your own monitoring, coupled with evidence from our lesson visits during the inspection, highlights that this can 'muddy the water'. Sometimes, what starts off as a geography lesson can end up as something completely different. When this happens, pupils do not develop important geographical knowledge as well as they could.

You know that the significant building blocks of the geography curriculum have not been identified. As such, teachers do not emphasise consistently the same concept or idea so that pupils remember more over time. Additionally, scrutiny of the school's current schemes of work for geography demonstrate that aspects of the national curriculum are not included in sufficient depth. For example, pupils do not use maps when learning about the environmental regions, key physical and human characteristics, countries, and major cities of North America or Europe.

Some classes have participated in hands-on geographical fieldwork when conducting primary data collection in the pouring rain at the Little Don River, Langsett. Despite the inclement weather conditions at the time, the key stage 2 pupils I spoke to could recall in detail where they would find the fastest flowing water, how a waterfall is formed and why the water in the upper course of a river contains less sediment. In these activities pupils are gaining knowledge of what it means to be a geographer.

In lessons, pupils work well with each other. They are eager to answer teachers' probing questions which are interspersed effectively with subject-specific vocabulary. Children in the early years are beginning to think and speak like a geographer. For example, a number of children were pleased to inform their teacher that the ocean surrounding Antarctica was the Southern Ocean. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported to access the school's geography curriculum. Teaching assistants know these pupils well and offer effective one-to-one support in lessons when required. The curriculum for pupils with SEND is equally ambitious as it is for other pupils.

I highlighted to you and to teachers that some pupils display misconceptions in their understanding about climate, sustainability and global warming among other things. This is, in part, due to a lack of subject-specific training for teachers.

You had previously identified that the current approach to assessment in geography needed to be amended. This is something that you and your staff are working on at the moment. This is because, currently, teachers' assessment does not provide them or you with an understanding of what pupils do well in geography and where they need further support. Consequently, over time, the curriculum has not been amended to address any possible shortcomings in pupils' geographical knowledge and understanding.

The subject leader is enthusiastic about her role and quest to ensure pupils make sense of the world around them. Opportunities for the subject leader of geography to network or share ideas and resources with other subject leaders are in the process of being identified and established.

Evidence

I met with you and the subject leader for geography. I visited lessons in the early years foundation stage and in key stages 1 and 2. I spoke to pupils from these lessons about their work in geography. I looked at a selection of pupils' work from the lessons I visited with you and the subject leader of geography. I evaluated the geography curriculum plans and met with teachers to discuss the lesson visits and their approach to the teaching of geography.

Context

Silkstone Common Junior and Infant School is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are currently 150 pupils on roll. All classes are taught in mixed-age groups. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or with SEND is below 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 Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Elliott

Her Majesty's Inspector