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Mrs Jill Litchfield
Headteacher
Bournehall Primary School
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Dear Mrs Litchfield

Subject inspection of Bournehall Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 30 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 previous 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

The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead curriculum development very well. Subject leadership is allocated to two separate teams, with responsibility for geography shared between individual teachers. These teachers draw on external support, for example through subject meetings with local schools and using Geographical Association resources to review the provision. They also take responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Although there is a subject action plan for geography, its development has not been a priority this year because previous work has been undertaken to review and revise this aspect of the curriculum.

The content and structure of the geography curriculum are supported by externally purchased resources. From these, staff have set out a coherent and sensibly sequenced set of topics spanning a wide range of contexts at different scales and contrasting locations. From the outset in their learning about the wider world, children in Reception build their knowledge and understanding of their own location and locality. They are quickly introduced to the concept of distance and scale.

Teachers are ambitious in their use of geography-specific vocabulary. Children are familiar with terms such as 'globe', 'country' and 'continent' and can conceptualise distance to faraway places such as China.

Throughout the school, teachers' precision with geographical vocabulary and their emphasis on the location of people and places are a strong feature of the teaching of the geography curriculum. In Year 2, for example, pupils know that Antarctica is inhospitable and uninhabited, and that settlement is not permanent. Even more impressively, pupils can work out which countries and continents are nearest to the South Pole and explain that it is currently summer in the Southern Hemisphere. Pupils in Year 5 speak knowledgeably about the different features of rivers and how river processes influence human geography.

Pupils' place knowledge is consolidated and developed by stimulating and visible resources. Classrooms have globes, atlases and wall maps that pupils routinely refer to, and the assembly hall displays a large, ever-changing world map locating people and places. Teaching makes excellent use of well-planned resources to bring the subject alive and widen pupils' knowledge. These include aerial images, photos, maps, videos and role-play spaces. During the inspection, children in Reception had their own 'melting icebergs' to investigate in the outdoor space, although the cold temperatures did not promote much of a thaw!

Coverage of the key aspects of the national curriculum is comprehensive and suitably ambitious. Geography is woven into units of work, with a wide range of contexts in different localities and at different scales. The sequence of topics is carefully considered, with opportunities to revisit prior learning. For example, pupils study volcanoes in Year 3 and the tectonic processes are studied in more detail in Year 6 when pupils learn how these shape the human and physical geography of the United States of America. Links between subjects are also carefully considered. For example, pupils learn about volcanoes in geography and Pompeii in history. Year 5 pupils read 'Journey to the River Sea' when they are studying the Amazon River.

In contrast, the development and application of geographical skills are less well planned. Although pupils go on trips and sometimes collect information from observations in the field, such as local river study, pupils rarely collate, present and analyse geographical information to investigate spatial patterns and processes. The purpose and value of collecting and analysing geographical information are not planned in the same systematic way as other elements of the geography curriculum. Similarly, pupils do not often apply their geographical knowledge to make locational decisions.

Teachers use questioning skilfully to build pupils' knowledge and assess their understanding, both orally in lessons and in dialogue about pupils' written work. Clever interrogation ensures that pupils systematically build upon and deepen their geographical knowledge. Teachers are quick to spot misconceptions, correct mistakes and then adapt work to make sure that no pupils are 'left behind'. This

systematic approach to teaching is effective in making sure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are able to access the curriculum.

Pupils of all ages show good knowledge and curiosity about their world. They are encouraged to ask their own questions and seek answers. This inquisitiveness is promoted by weekly 'news sessions'. Older pupils confidently talk about wider issues, such as global warming, the Australian bush fires and tsunamis. The school is outward looking in many ways: Bournehall has international school status and has links with children in other countries worldwide, and fair-trade events raise pupils' awareness of their influence as global consumers. In promoting pupils' knowledge of environmental and global issues, the school is a positive influence in developing responsible young citizens.

Everyday assessment is highly effective, but the expectation that teachers should complete overly detailed and unnecessarily burdensome assessments each term adds little to what teachers already know about pupils' progress.

Evidence

During my visit, I spoke with you and your deputy headteacher, and held discussions with three teachers and the chair of the governing body. I looked at the school's geography curriculum planning. Together, we visited lessons across the school and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work in their geography books. I spoke informally to pupils in their classrooms and discussed their work. I had a more formal discussion with a group of Year 6 pupils.

Context

Bournehall is an average-sized primary school with 241 pupils on roll. Although the majority of pupils are from a White British heritage, pupils come from a diverse range of different backgrounds, including pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The proportion of pupils with SEND, and the proportion with education, health and care plans are above the national figure.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector