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Mr Martin Humble
Headteacher
St Matthew's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School
Alnwick Grove
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Dear Mr Humble

Subject inspection of St Matthew's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 February 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

Geography is at the heart of the curriculum at St Matthew's. Currently, leaders are involved in a geography curriculum project involving 26 primary and secondary schools. Comprehensive plans and resources have been developed collaboratively to support pupils' transition between primary and secondary school. When the project is complete, it is intended that pupils in key stage 2 will learn a wide range of human and physical geography topics, including a comparison of different biomes around the world. You and other colleagues hope that this will help pupils in the primary phase develop a deeper understanding of the most important geographical content and prepare pupils well for their move to secondary school. Leaders involved in the project speak highly about the opportunity to share ideas and learn from experienced geographers.

Although there are plans in place to teach geography as a discrete subject from September 2020, currently, geography is taught within the school's topic-based curriculum approach, alongside history and other subjects, such as science.

Teachers use detailed schemes of work to help them plan geography within the topic lessons over time. Teachers' subject knowledge of physical geography and map skills is strong. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to learn about the physical landscape and refine their map skills across key stages 1 and 2. However, pupils are not provided with sufficient or regular opportunities to learn about some aspects of human geography. For example, plans and pupils' workbooks lack detail in relation to settlement, economic activity, trade links and the distribution of natural resources. Consequently, pupils' understanding of human geography is not as well developed as it is for physical geography.

There are many opportunities for pupils to ensure that they remember geographical content over longer periods of time. Pupils say they really enjoy learning the 'geography songs' that help them to remember the continents or getting 'out and about' to see geography in action. In this respect, meaningful geographical fieldwork is evident in key stage 2 but less so in key stage 1. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 improve their understanding of the tourism industry when visiting South Shields. Furthermore, pupils evaluate and explore tourism and land use on the island of Lindisfarne and compare this to South Shields. Pupils' knowledge of their own region and surrounding counties is strong.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the full geography curriculum. This group of pupils achieve well in geography because teachers and other staff have high expectations for them. Staff provide expert advice and guidance, regularly emphasising important vocabulary and teaching points. In this way, the teacher's instructions are made more explicit and/or broken down into steps for pupils with SEND to understand more clearly.

Teachers introduce into the curriculum many opportunities for pupils to contrast their region to another. During the inspection, pupils in Year 6 were confidently using technology to locate and identify differences and similarities between Jarrow and its twin town of Wuppertal in Germany. In this class and others, pupils' geographical vocabulary is impressive. For example, in Reception, pupils regularly used the word 'pollution' when describing some parts of the River Tyne. In Year 2, pupils described 'hydroelectric power' when describing Craggside Hall in Northumberland, the first home in the world to be lit by hydroelectricity.

Geography is clearly celebrated and valued across the school. Rewards schemes, displays and many reading books all contain a geographical theme. Leaders ensure that staff have the resources they need to plan purposeful geography lessons. Additionally, staff build effective cross-curricular links when possible. For example, pupils in Reception learn about Israel and its cuisine when learning about where Jesus was born. All pupils take part in the 'daily mile challenge' and link their progress in this regard to the distance they travel away from Jarrow.

Leaders know that the school's systems and procedures to quality assure the effectiveness of the geography curriculum are not as strong as in other subjects. For

example, teachers have received feedback from leaders following visits to their topic lessons. However, the feedback teachers receive is not sufficiently focused on the geographical content, skills or knowledge pupils should be developing. Consequently, opportunities to adapt and improve the geography curriculum may be missed.

Evidence

I met with you, the subject leader for geography and the senior leader with oversight of 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 that I visited with the subject leader and a senior leader. I evaluated the geography curriculum plans and met with teachers to discuss the lesson visits and their approach to the teaching of geography.

Context

St Matthew's is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are currently 204 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportions of pupils with SEND and pupils with an education, health and care plan are well above 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 South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Elliott

Her Majesty's Inspector