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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Claire Taylor
Blackpool St Nicholas CofE Primary School
School Road
Marton Moss
Blackpool
Lancashire
FY4 5DS

Dear Miss Taylor

No formal designation inspection of Blackpool St Nicholas CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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. The subject in focus was languages.

Main findings

You have very recently taken up post as headteacher having been deputy headteacher at the school previously. As such, you are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. You have identified French as a subject that needs to improve.

In September 2018, leaders reviewed the languages curriculum. All pupils across key stage 2 restarted French from scratch at that point. This decision was made because pupils had a jumbled experience of languages. Current Year 6, for example, have studied some French and some Mandarin in Years 3, 4 and 5. They have restarted French in February this year, not having had any French lessons since September. They have wide gaps in their knowledge.

This is the second year of the roll out of the French curriculum. This has not gone as well as you had hoped. Some of the content that teachers introduced in Years 4 and 5 was too advanced for pupils. It did not build upon what they already knew. You have learned from this and current plans are more logical in as far as French is concerned.

All pupils study French between Year 3 and Year 6 now. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those that are disadvantaged. Class teachers teach languages. They use a scheme of work that provides supporting resources, including sound files. The sound files are particularly helpful. They support teachers' and pupils' French pronunciation. Teachers are enthusiastic about teaching languages. Pupils feed off this enthusiasm and participate well in lessons.

Some areas of leadership are strong in French. The 'subject leader handbook' is comprehensive and helpful. You ask pupils what they think of languages and make sure that this information forms part of your development plans. You check the quality of the curriculum. This includes looking at pupils' work and visiting lessons. Through this monitoring, you identified French as a subject that needs to improve.

During my visit, I saw class teachers making sensible and seamless links between French and other curriculum areas. When introducing the French vocabulary for different musical instruments, a link to 'The Carnival of the Animals' was made. This helped pupils to put their language learning into context.

However, the French curriculum is in its infancy. Pupils have developed a limited stock of words in French. There has not been a focus on developing pupils' understanding of simple grammar. In addition, the sound-spelling link in French has not been taught systematically. Pupils have not been taught how to build simple sentences. They have not had enough opportunities to speak French at greater length or write simple paragraphs.

Current pupils have not had access to a curriculum that matches the breadth and depth of the national curriculum. You are well aware of this. Achievement is low in languages because the curriculum has been weak and haphazard in the past. The most pupils can do is recall random vocabulary and participate in a limited number of rehearsed question and answer exchanges.

You know that studying languages is important. In diversity week, different home languages were celebrated, including Polish, Russian and Romany. An international link with South Africa is well under way, with Zulu and Afrikaans as languages to explore. You are also aware that there is substantial work to do in this subject area and you have plans in place to make improvements.

Evidence

I met with you, your acting deputy headteacher and your curriculum leader for French. I visited French lessons in Years 3, 4 and 5 and looked at a selection of pupils' work in French. This included work from lessons that I visited. I spoke with groups of pupils about their learning in French. I evaluated the curriculum plans, policies and development plans for languages. I spoke to teachers whose lessons I visited about the curriculum in French.

Context

Blackpool St Nicholas Church of England Primary School is a larger than average primary school. There are currently 411 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with SEND, including pupils with education, health and care plans, is below average.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector