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Mrs Vicki Briody
Headteacher
Abacus Belsize Primary School
Jubilee Waterside Centre
105 Camley Street
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Dear Mrs Briody

Subject inspection of Abacus Belsize Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 March 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. This inspection looked at geography.

Main findings

You have prioritised the teaching of the foundation subjects at the level of individual disciplines since the school opened seven years ago. You have been supported by your deputy headteacher in overseeing this work. Curriculum plans in geography show clearly how pupils build their geographical knowledge over time, from the Reception Year through to Year 6. As a leadership team, you review what is effective and what is less so. You have made changes accordingly and continue to refine your plans.

In the early years, children quickly build a sense of place. They walk along the canal towpath that is adjacent to the school's temporary home. From this, they build a basic understanding of their part of London. Your half-termly outdoor learning days on Hampstead Heath help all pupils to develop a sense of place and community. Visits to other parts of London, Epping Forest and coastal towns, such as Clacton-

on-Sea, build pupils' understanding of human and physical processes in geography. They also provide opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge of geographical skills, including the use of maps and compasses.

Over the last 18 months, you have undertaken a radical overhaul of the curriculum. Under your leadership, the staff team has agreed a clearly defined set of principles and expectations. All staff fully buy into this and are committed to bringing about a highly effective curriculum for all pupils. Within this is a determined commitment to ensure that disadvantaged pupils develop an understanding of the locality and the community, and undertake experiences that they might not otherwise get.

Another of the key drivers through all the curriculum plans is the use of specific, geographical vocabulary. Teachers insist on pupils' use of correct terminology in classes from the early years through to Year 6. Pupils have a good understanding of these terms and use them appropriately in their work.

Curriculum plans show clear progression across the curriculum. The content builds year-on-year and there is a balance between physical processes, human processes and geographical skills. However, pupils' geographical skills are not as well developed. This is because most staff do not have the subject knowledge that they need to ensure technical accuracy in their own teaching.

Nonetheless, there is a cohesion to curriculum planning both within geography and across subjects through the 'conscious connections' that are listed in plans. These help pupils to recap on geographical learning when they are studying topics that have a focus on another subject, such as history. This is not always as successful as it might be because the curriculum plans do not define the geographical learning outcomes clearly enough.

Pupils have a good appreciation of locational knowledge. They can identify the different continents and major oceans of the world. They can locate many of the world's cities and biomes on a globe or maps. However, pupils' appreciation of scale is not well developed.

Many of the units studied are based on drawing out the similarities and differences between different parts of the world. Often, these draw pupils back to their locality or London. This gives pupils the frame of reference they need.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) experience the same curriculum as other pupils. There is no narrowing of the curriculum for them. However, too often, pupils with SEND do not get the support they need to access the curriculum fully. Consequently, their work is often not as high quality as that of other pupils.

As a result of the well-constructed plans, pupils are enthusiastic about learning geography. They can recall much of what they have learned earlier in the year and

in previous years and can link current learning to it. Pupils are particularly passionate about climate change and take their role as responsible citizens very seriously.

Trust and school leaders are well aware that many teachers are not sufficiently skilled in teaching geography and other foundation subjects. Trust-wide plans are being developed to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

Evidence

I met with you and your deputy headteacher, who together have overall responsibility for curriculum. During our meetings, I reviewed your geography curriculum plans. You and your deputy joined me when I visited lessons in the early years and key stages 1 and 2. I spoke to pupils in all classes and had a more formal discussion with a group of Year 6 pupils to discuss their learning in geography lessons. I looked at a selection of pupils' geography work in books. I met with teachers to discuss the lesson visits and their approaches to teaching geography. Finally, I met with one of the primary-phase leaders for the multi-academy trust.

Context

Abacus Belsize Primary School has 174 pupils on roll from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who have support plans is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average. Pupil numbers have risen each year as additional year groups have been added. This is the first year that the school has had pupils all the way through to Year 6. This school is a free school and is part of Anthem Schools Trust, a multi-academy trust.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland

Her Majesty's Inspector