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Mrs Demelza Bolton
Executive Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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Cornwall
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Dear Mrs Bolton

Subject inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Falmouth

Following my visit to your school on 5 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 and your head of school have been in the process of revising the content of the geography curriculum as part of a wider redevelopment of the curriculum and assessment processes. Your work since the summer of 2019 has been instrumental in developing new curriculum planning and ensuring that geography is taught and assessed as a discipline in its own right. You have used social justice as the guiding principle of curriculum design. This aims to ensure that all pupils experience a curriculum that meets their needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged.

Where it works well, the geography curriculum is clearly sequenced and pays close attention to the order in which knowledge is taught so that pupils' geographical knowledge develops securely. Younger pupils are exposed to historical maps of Falmouth to explore how and why the advancement of the railways expanded the land used for docks in Victorian times. Pupils also study topographical maps to understand why Pendennis Castle, at the mouth of the River Fal, is such a strategically important defensive site. This early mapwork prepares pupils well for

future work using smaller scale maps exploring the routes taken by the Falmouth packet ships and fieldwork studies on Cornwall beaches and their locations. Pupils are challenged when required to plan their own fieldwork investigation on the concentrations of plastic found along Gyllyngvase Beach, including collecting, recording and analysing data.

Teachers are developing some meaningful links across the curriculum and more are planned. When pupils in Year 2 study Cornish lighthouses, they also read 'The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch' in English. This allows for the geography and English curriculums to support each other, while not losing the integrity of either subject. Pupils were keen to share their work with me, tell me why lighthouses were located where they were and explain that Trevoze Head was the most northerly lighthouse in Cornwall. Pupils find such links exciting and say that they help them further develop their place and locational knowledge of Cornwall.

When the curriculum is less effectively sequenced and implemented, it confuses pupils and they do not build secure knowledge. For example, pupils in Year 1 lack the prior knowledge of the position of the sun, polar regions and weather patterns on the equator in order to fully comprehend how latitude affects temperature around the world. Too much content is introduced at the same time, which compounds the problem. In other cases, enabling knowledge is not sequenced well. For example, pupils are required to apply their knowledge of compass points and directions when studying mapwork, before these concepts have been taught in mathematics.

Overall, you are acutely aware of the need to further develop the geography curriculum and gain a clearer oversight of how effectively it is being delivered by teachers. Your work to date on identifying the key components that make up the substantive and disciplinary knowledge pupils require has provided greater clarity for all. Teachers welcome the opportunity to revisit content introduced earlier in the school so that pupils' knowledge deepens. They are enthusiastic about the changes being made and are strong advocates for the subject. They recognise the part geography plays in developing pupils' wider knowledge of the relationship and connectedness of human and physical processes. However, the application of propositional and substantive knowledge that leads to the procedural knowledge of key geographical concepts has not yet been fully considered in terms of place, environment and scale.

Evidence

I met with you, the head of school and the leader responsible for curriculum development. I held discussions with three teachers and a group of pupils from Years 1, 5 and 6. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including schemes of work, subject and leadership action plans, examples of monitoring by school leaders, procedures for assessing pupils' performance and a sample of pupils' work in geography. Together with you and the head of school, I visited classes in Years 1,

5 and 6 to observe the teaching of geography, look at pupils' work and talk to them about their learning.

Context

St Mary's is a one-form entry primary school with 215 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language are lower than the national averages. The proportions of pupils who have an education, health and care plan or who receive additional support for their SEND are lower than the national averages.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector