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Miss Lisa Golding
Headteacher
Barnfield Primary School
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Dear Miss Golding

Subject inspection of Barnfield Primary School

Following my visit on 3 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.

Main findings

The history curriculum is currently being reviewed. You and your subject leader know that current planning in history does not emphasise with enough precision what the school intends pupils to know, remember and be able to do by the end of each topic. A lack of clear curricular goals in history inhibits teachers' ability to assess how well pupils are learning the subject.

Aspects of the history curriculum do not reflect fully the ambition of the national curriculum. Pupils in key stage 2 do not currently learn about Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots, for example. More deeply, pupils are not given opportunities to deploy their growing historical knowledge in a sustained way in response to historically valid questions, particularly about change, continuity, cause and significance. These weaker aspects of the curriculum undermine the impact of your highly skilled teachers in deepening and extending pupils' learning in history.

Hence, the high levels of motivation and enjoyment the teachers have cultivated in pupils, and pupils' palpable enthusiasm for history, do not consistently result in the best possible outcomes.

The work in pupils' books shows that teachers sometimes devise for themselves good-quality questions about history. However, pupils are rarely given enough time to respond to these questions in any depth. For example, Year 5 books showed how pupils had spent time drawing and labelling a picture of a market stall from medieval Baghdad. Only after the work was complete, were pupils asked to reflect on the importance of trade in spreading Islamic ideas. Similarly, in Year 4, pupils gathered lots of information about Alfred the Great, but only after they had finished the work were they asked to consider why he was given this epithet. Consequently, the pupils' responses to both of these valuable and well-conceived questions were limited to a single sentence.

Pupils learn to draw contrasts and connections between different civilisations from the same period of history. For example, they compare early Islamic civilisation to early medieval Europe and the Shang dynasty with Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece. Teachers make connections routinely, explicitly and accurately. Pupils' sense of period is also enhanced by the homework tasks they are set to enrich their understanding of the topics taught. Although the key stage 2 curriculum is not sequenced chronologically, teachers regularly refer to previous learning, and use timelines, to help pupils place the topics they are learning about in their historical context. The pupils I spoke with had a secure grasp of chronology. However, a few said they found jumping backwards and forwards to be confusing.

Since joining the school in September, you have prioritised improving the curriculum across the foundation subjects. You have put in place plans to increase the blocks of time devoted to different subjects, including history, to give pupils more time to deepen and embed their knowledge. You have also empowered your subject leaders by giving them licence to lead rather than merely coordinate their subjects. You are currently providing the training needed for them to carry out their roles effectively. Your teachers reflect constantly on their practice, and they welcome the additional support and challenge they are receiving from the subject leaders, including in history.

The subject leader is carrying out her role very effectively. While the findings from this visit added precision to her understanding of how history can be improved, she had already identified the changes needed prior to my visit. She has made good use of her visits to lessons and discussions with pupils this year, to bring about initial improvements to the curriculum. As a result, staff now have a shared understanding of the vocabulary that pupils need to deploy during each topic. The subject leader has also helped refine teachers' short-term planning by helping teachers focus more on what they want pupils to learn rather than what they want pupils to do. Similarly, she has challenged and supported teachers where their planning was not firmly rooted in developing pupils' historical knowledge.

Evidence

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and the subject leader for history. I visited two lessons in Year 5 and lesson in Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6. I met with teachers and groups of pupils from these lessons and looked at pupils' work. I looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan and curriculum planning in history.

Context

The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, and three quarters of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is much higher than average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.

Staffing is generally stable, though there have been regular changes to senior leadership since the last inspection. You and the subject leader for history joined the in September 2019. The deputy headteacher joined in January 2020.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector