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Mr Ben Waldram
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Waldram

Subject inspection of Lowdham Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 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

Leaders value geography and its place in the curriculum. You recognise that geography matters as a subject in its own right and in its ability to enhance pupils' understanding of other subjects. You have a clear vision of how geography can help pupils learn about their local area, as well as the world beyond.

The geography curriculum is in a period of transition. A new curriculum leader has raised the profile of the subject. As part of a recent review, she has identified areas of strength and some things that need to improve. Many aspects of the national curriculum are covered. However, there are some notable gaps, particularly at key stage 2. Some themes are not covered in enough detail, for example trade links and mountains. The subject leader has revised some of the curriculum plans to include the missing elements. For instance, later this year pupils will learn about the impact of the volcano and earthquakes on the island of St Lucia.

Pupils have good knowledge of their local area. In early years, children identify the location of buildings in the village. Year 1 pupils draw simple field sketches of the main street. In Year 2, pupils spot how the village has changed over time, using aerial photographs and digital maps. By upper key stage 2, pupils develop a detailed understanding of the village's changing history through maps. Pupils' study of the local area builds on their geographical knowledge and skills over time.

Pupils consider how other places compare with Lowdham. For instance, the Year 1 teacher used her visit to a Ghanaian village to help pupils understand how life there differs from their own lives. Trips to Sneinton in Nottingham and the 'golden mile' in Leicester help key stage 2 pupils appreciate regional differences. Pupils identify human and physical features of the landscape when they visit Castleton. Each fieldwork visit helps to enrich pupils' geographical understanding.

However, teachers often plan topics in isolation from each other. They do not plan the curriculum to build on pupils' prior learning. Leaders do not check that topics follow a logical sequence, with well-thought-out end points. This hinders the opportunities for pupils to make links between different aspects of geography, to deepen their knowledge.

Leaders' curriculum plans sometimes lack ambition. For example, when key stage 2 pupils learn about France, they do not focus on a particular region. This does not allow pupils to draw useful comparisons. There are too few opportunities for pupils to make connections between the different aspects of human and physical geography. This limits their ability to show how well they have understood their learning.

Throughout key stages 1 and 2, there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' locational knowledge and geographical skills. For example, in Year 1, pupils identify the continent that different old toys came from. Pupils' use of maps becomes more skilled over time. On occasion, teachers do not check that pupils use these skills accurately, particularly when pupils are finding grid references.

When possible, teachers forge cross-curricular links with other subjects, such as English. For instance, in early years, children drew a map to help the wolf go back to grandma's house to say sorry to Little Red Riding Hood. Upper key stage 2 pupils used their experience of reading 'Masai and I' to learn more about African tribes and their way of life. Leaders know the importance of developing subject-specific vocabulary. They are refining vocabulary lists for each year group so that they fit the different topic areas more precisely.

The geography curriculum leader is benefiting from leadership training. Some teachers do not feel as confident in their geographical knowledge or pedagogy as they do in other subjects. Leaders are organising the training that teachers need to plan and implement the geography curriculum well.

Pupils told me that they enjoy learning about geography. They are keen to find out more about the world around them. Some younger pupils struggled to recall what they had learned about the geographical topic they had studied most recently. Pupils told me they did not learn about geography as often as they did other subjects, such as history and science.

Evidence

During this visit, I met with you and the geography curriculum leader. I spoke with teachers about the geography curriculum, including the early years leader. I visited lessons jointly with leaders. I reviewed work in a selection of pupils' books and met with two groups of pupils to talk with them about their geography learning. I scrutinised geography curriculum plans and other relevant documentation, including the school's action plan for the subject.

Context

The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are currently 201 pupils on roll, across seven classes. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. A large proportion of pupils are from a White British background. Few pupils speak English as an additional language. Staffing at the school is stable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Southwell, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Nottinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector