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Mr N Vasey
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Vasey

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 19 October 2010 to look at work in RE.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with strong capacity for improvement.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- By the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2, the standards reached by the pupils are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. This represents satisfactory progress overall.
- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils know about some of the key features of the Christian and Jewish religions. They learn stories well and remember the central characters. Most pupils have some understanding of the messages of stories, such as the parable of the widow's mite. They identify some features of religions, such as special buildings, holy books, key people and some symbols. Pupils can also talk about ideas, such as their personal identity and saying 'thank you', but their understanding of

how these ideas relate to their learning in RE is underdeveloped. They understand that people of different religions live in their neighbourhood. However, pupils have limited awareness of the differences between religions or why religion is important to people.

- Pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 is very mixed but satisfactory overall. They demonstrate solid achievement of some aspects of their learning, particularly in factual knowledge and the ability to distinguish between religions on the basis of their similarities and differences; although some pupils are confused on this point. Two key areas of understanding are underdeveloped. Pupils have limited awareness of the impact of religions on individuals and the wider community. While they have good knowledge of some aspects of each religion they lack the coherent overview of religions that comes from making links between different areas of knowledge.
- Pupils' personal development in the context of RE is also satisfactory. They usually enjoy the subject and it makes an important contribution to their awareness of diversity in their neighbourhood.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- Both lessons observed were of at least satisfactory quality and one had some good features. Teachers' subject knowledge was good and the activities were designed to help pupils meet the learning objectives for the lesson. Group tasks were used effectively to match activities to pupils' abilities and to maximise the impact of teaching assistants. In the Year 6 class, group activities were designed very well to encourage enquiry-based learning. Teachers used questioning well to check pupils' understanding. The support provided by the teaching assistants was generally good.
- Elsewhere, pupils were heavily dependent on their teachers and had few opportunities for investigations or developing skills. In these cases, pupils' work consisted largely of describing religious phenomena or re-telling stories.
- While the two areas of attainment, learning 'about and from' religion, dictate the learning objectives for lessons they are not consistently inter-related with the result that pupils do not always understand how their personal learning relates to what they have learnt about religions.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision meets statutory requirements but is still in the process of reflecting fully the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The school has been slow to implement the 2007 Plymouth Agreed Syllabus as a result of internal restructuring. The RE coordinator is tackling the curriculum review with commitment and energy.

- Curriculum planning is based on unit titles recommended by the local authority. The medium-term planning, provided by the subject leader, is generally of high quality and designed to match pupils' needs.
- Progression throughout the curriculum is defined with reference to the level descriptions in the previous agreed syllabus. The levels given in the scheme of work are currently unrealistically demanding and need to be revised.
- A strong pattern of enrichment activities is being developed to support learning. Good use is made of contacts with the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities in the local area and a local Hindu family provides valuable support.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject coordinator has quickly and enthusiastically established her role. She provides at least satisfactory leadership across the school, particularly through high-quality planning, although this is incomplete. Her impact has been high and the potential for improvement is good.
- Although no formal monitoring is in place, the subject coordinator has conducted an informal review and, as a result, has listed a number of sensible priorities, which are designed to bring about further improvements in provision.
- The school holds a good collection of RE resources including books, artefacts, videos and DVDs but not all teachers are confident in their use.
- The school has reduced teachers' non-contact time by the team teaching two classes together, however, this is not as effective as it could be. Where pairs of classes are taught together, activities are often unimaginative, pupils are particularly dependent on the teacher, and their work is dominated by descriptive writing. Under these circumstances, pupils' understanding and skills are not developed well.
- The school benefits from its proximity to the Plymouth multi-faith centre and the subject leader has attended RE meetings held there. However, since taking post, she has not had an opportunity to brief the staff or identify their training needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- fully implementing the 2007 Plymouth Agreed Syllabus, with attention to how the themes, knowledge, skills and understanding can be developed through the planned units
- making the existing assessment system more rigorous by introducing the level descriptions from the agreed syllabus
- raising standards by giving pupils opportunities to achieve in all areas of the agreed syllabus, not just in knowledge of religions
- providing training in RE for all teachers in the school.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill
Additional Inspector