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Mr K Ledbury
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ledbury

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 15 February 2011 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 good with some outstanding features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Attainment meets and sometimes exceeds the expectations of the South Gloucestershire agreed syllabus and compares well with that of similar schools. Achievement across the school is good.
- Year 2 pupils can use appropriate words and phrases in talking about features of religion and can explain why it is important for some people. They can re-tell religious stories and explain their meanings as well as meanings of religious actions and symbols. For example, they can explain the purpose of Christian baptism.

- Pupils in Years 5 and 6 make good progress. They work consistently at Level 4 and several are, or are on the verge of, attaining specific aspects of Level 5. Their use of technical vocabulary and knowledge of religions are progressing well, although they occasionally confuse the details of different religions. They are developing the abilities to make links between aspects of religions, to make comparisons within and between religions, and to recognise the impact of religion on people's lives. Those working towards Level 5 have not yet developed fully the level of understanding that allows them to generalise from religion-specific details; for example to draw conclusions about the purpose of festivals after studying specific celebrations. Pupils also make good progress in relation to attainment target 2, 'learning from' religion.
- Pupils enjoy RE. All aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through RE are good. They have several opportunities for reflection and for discussing beliefs and ideas; they think carefully about moral issues; have good opportunities for working with others; and develop good knowledge of faiths and cultures.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good with some outstanding features.

- Teaching is characterised by careful planning based on a good understanding of the locally agreed syllabus and includes a clear balance across the two attainment targets.
- Teachers show enthusiasm for RE and are confident in their subject knowledge, which enables them to make meaningful links with other curriculum areas.
- Teachers employ outstanding questioning skills to take pupils' thinking forward and they make excellent use of available resources, especially information and communication technology. Pupils use laptops to assist in their enquiry work.
- Several methods are used to make the work accessible to pupils of all abilities, such as different resources, tasks and the use of well-informed teaching assistants.
- A particular strength of teaching, seen specifically in the Year 2 lesson observed, is the sensitive encouragement given to pupils from minority faiths to share their experience and practice.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The school follows the South Gloucestershire agreed syllabus closely. This secures a balanced coverage of the subject and helps to ensure that there are no weak areas in pupils' learning.

- Some good use is made of 'blocked' units of RE ensuring that learning is sustained and links are made with other areas of the curriculum. Care is taken to avoid making contrived links and where RE does not relate to the broader theme, it is taught alone.
- Across the school, curriculum continuity is achieved through the careful use of the attainment targets, which are a focus of all planning, and the balanced coverage of the religions taught, which are re-visited throughout the school.
- Motivating pupils by including events and visitors has been a focus of development. Particularly strong links have been forged with local churches.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is outstanding.

- The subject is led by an experienced and enthusiastic teacher who has taken RE to its current position of popularity with staff and pupils.
- Improvement planning is well informed by rigorous monitoring, which contributes to annual reporting to parents, to the local authority and to the governing body. Your twice-yearly interviews with the RE leader are indicative of the seriousness with which the school management takes the subject. This ensures that senior managers are well informed about, and well-placed to support, RE in the school.
- Evidence about RE is provided by the subject leader's monitoring of teaching, scrutiny of work and interviewing of pupils. The quality of monitoring is unusually high as are some of the outcomes; for example, the subject leader provides written feedback to all teachers and has taught RE alongside a staff member seen to need support with the subject, bringing about improvement. This thorough monitoring has led to improvements in the attitude of pupils and staff and in standards. The capacity for further improvement is excellent.
- The subject leader takes full advantage of the training offered by the local authority through the annual SACRE conference and is appreciative of the support provided by the advisory teacher.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- devising strategies for minimising pupils' confusion between religions
- consolidating the achievement of the most able to enable them to reach the higher levels of attainment.

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