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Mrs L Charles
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Dear Mrs Charles

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 14 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: observation of one lesson; interviews with staff and pupils; and scrutiny of curriculum planning and assessment records.

The overall effectiveness of RE is inadequate.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is inadequate.

- The standards attained by the pupils are well below average. Evidence from lessons and pupils' work indicates that while pupils develop an appropriate understanding of a range of moral and social issues, their understanding of the religious perspectives that they apply to these issues is often superficial and formulaic. This, in part, reflects weaknesses in the provision for RE at Key Stage 2, where limited attention is being paid to the systematic development of pupils' knowledge and understanding of religions. As a result, pupils do not make enough progress in acquiring a breadth of understanding of religion and belief to match the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.

- The quality of the personal development of pupils in RE is satisfactory. Many enjoy the subject and participate well. Pupils are given time in lessons to reflect on their feelings and thoughts. All pupils show positive attitudes to the subject. Older pupils do not have enough opportunities to explore issues related to religion in the modern world or explore religious diversity. Consequently, the subject makes a sound contribution to pupils' moral and social development, but their spiritual and cultural development within RE is less well developed.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is inadequate.

- Teaching incorporates some positive features including the effective management of behaviour, good relationships with pupils and a dedicated commitment to the subject.
- The purpose of lessons is shared carefully with pupils and teachers seek to check whether it has been understood and achieved. However, in practice, the structure of activities does not always ensure that the learning enables pupils to meet those objectives. Some of the tasks are not challenging enough to extend the skills of older more able pupils, particularly where pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 are taught in one mixed-age class. On occasions, the connections between activities are not clear or the use of 'creative' activities distracts from the RE focus of the lesson. In some classes, there is too much reliance on the use of worksheets, which narrows the quality of the learning.
- There are strengths, with some good use of creative activity to stimulate interest and enjoyment. Puppet-making, dressing up, story-telling and imaginative use of information and communication technology are among the examples seen. However, when the creative activities are not fully integrated into the learning they do not relate clearly to the main RE objective and slow pupils' progress. Learning is rather more limited in relation to developing pupils' critical awareness and their ability to use higher-level thinking skills in the context of the subject.
- Work has been undertaken to develop the pattern of assessment in RE. However, judgements are not reliable or robust enough, particularly in Key Stage 2, because assessments do not relate clearly enough to the pattern of progression outlined in the locally agreed syllabus. Although marking is regular, it does not give consistently precise advice to the pupils on how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is inadequate.

- Care has been taken to provide teachers with detailed lesson planning. However, the planning is often unclear about the key focus, concept or question driving each unit or about the ways in which each unit builds on

prior learning. Individual units do not always ensure that a clear process of learning runs through the work or provide for the structured development of skills and knowledge.

- Planning is based primarily on teaching RE in six units a year, usually on a once-a-week basis. The effect of this is to fragment learning and limit opportunities for more extended enquiries. Some of the more task-driven learning results from these limitations in the curriculum planning.
- While pupils have some opportunities to meet with or visit representatives from religions in the local area, the school is aware that it needs to extend this provision.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is inadequate.

- The subject leader for RE is hardworking and very committed. She has kept the subject running smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Despite some of the weaknesses in provision, she is becoming increasingly aware of the next steps in the subject's future development.
- Consideration is being given to ways in which the planning might be adjusted to ensure that the curriculum meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus so that high-quality learning can be developed and sustained.
- Some of the arrangements for monitoring RE have lapsed owing to ongoing staffing difficulties. The current arrangements are not rigorous enough to ensure a clearer focus on pupils' progress and on the consistency of assessment and quality of teaching in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing a clearer, more coherent and progressive overall curriculum for RE
- ensuring that pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to their learning about religions and beliefs are improved.

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 will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector