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Mrs J Byrne
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Dear Mrs Byrne

Ofsted 2011–12 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 24 May 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.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- The standard of pupils' work at Key Stage 1 is in line with expectations in the Devon agreed syllabus. Standards at Key Stage 2 are slightly above.
- Year 2 pupils show a good knowledge of the religions they have studied, notably Christianity and Judaism. They can recall stories and explain their meanings. In the lesson observed, pupils showed a good understanding of why the local church is important for those who attend it; particularly the importance of sharing bread and wine. They understood what a symbol is and could suggest meanings for Christian symbols and their use.

- Year 6 pupils use technical terms confidently when talking about religions and have a clear grasp of the key features of several religions. They demonstrate an impressive maturity when discussing issues relating to religion and spirituality. They have a particularly good understanding of how people's feelings and emotions relate to their experiences and expectations of religions; for example, they know that people often turn to religion in times of trouble, hoping for guidance and comfort. They talk insightfully about how religion has an impact on people's lives, for example through moral teachings, celebrations and rites of passage. They are beginning to understand how different forms of music are used in Christianity to express the feelings of believers in different situations, such as weddings and funerals.
- Most pupils enjoy RE and understand its value for understanding the world they live in and for understanding people from different cultures and religions. Pupils often discuss their own responses to what they have learnt. For example, they can transfer their experience of what is important in their lives to understanding why aspects of religion and beliefs are important to others. All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the context of RE are good.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Teachers generally have confident levels of specialist expertise which they use well in planning and teaching their subject. In some instances, this is excellent as in the case of a Year 6 lesson where the teacher had carefully thought out the links between feelings, emotions, music and religion and skilfully enabled pupils to understand this.
- Teachers use an interesting range of teaching strategies to promote good learning, including those that incorporate the development of high-level skills of enquiry and reflection. Year 6 pupils enjoyed researching religions in groups and making presentations to the class. Teachers frequently teach RE to help pupils reflect on what they have learnt to develop their own ideas and beliefs.
- The attainment targets and level descriptions for RE are not known well or used consistently in lesson planning or assessment. This led to a missed opportunity in one lesson where pupils of different abilities and ages were not set suitably challenging tasks which could have enabled those of high ability to make more progress.
- Assessment is limited and teachers have not developed strategies for collecting evidence from pupils' talk and discussion.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum is based closely on the Devon agreed syllabus and makes use of the published schemes of work, which are of a high quality.
- In this small school with mixed-age classes, a rolling programme enables pupils to experience all aspects of the RE curriculum. Continuity and progression are maintained through a central planning core of religions at each key stage.
- RE is planned sometimes in a subject block and at other times in conjunction with other subjects. Particularly good links are forged with music, a strength of the school. Links are made in such a way that, for the most part, pupils understand what RE is and what its distinctive purpose is in the curriculum.
- Some connections have been established with outside organisations and individuals, the strongest being with the village church and its vicar, a regular visitor. Pupils frequently visit the church. A strength of the recent Year 2 visit was its precise focus which directed pupils to focus their search to specific things. Similar links with other religions are less well established, although the subject leader is developing a helpful list of places to visit and visitors to invite to the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- Recent subject reviews and self-evaluations in the subject are realistic and honest. Strengths are rightly identified and improvement focuses on raising standards and improving provision. However, arrangements to monitor the subject are not yet systematic.
- The subject leader provides effective leadership and support for staff. In particular, she makes a valuable contribution to the teaching of Judaism, in which she has specialist knowledge, across the school.
- The subject leader has attended local training in the implementation of the agreed syllabus and, as a result, the programmes of study are understood well in the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- becoming better acquainted with the attainment targets and level descriptions in the agreed syllabus
- improving strategies for assessing RE, including collecting oral evidence
- strengthening the arrangements to monitor RE standards and provision throughout 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 published on the Ofsted website and will be sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about

any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill
Additional Inspector