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Mrs L Clarke
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Clarke

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 25 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Pupils' attainment across the key stages is broadly in line with expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The pattern of their progress is slightly uneven and is satisfactory overall.
- Pupils are able to retell some stories from religious traditions and use technical vocabulary to identify some features of religion. They can ask relevant questions and offer insights when investigating religious material. For example, pupils in Year 3 offered their own ideas while exploring creation stories. They demonstrate the ability to express their ideas and feelings about elements of personal experience and moral issues. However, there is an overemphasis on personal reflection which is not linked to learning about religious beliefs and practices. As a result, pupils

do not demonstrate an appropriately coherent knowledge and understanding of religions and beliefs.

- Pupils' attitudes towards RE are positive. They recognise its importance in terms of understanding diversity and respecting others. They do, however, recognise that opportunities to meet people from a range of faiths are limited. RE is making some contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory.

- RE lessons are well organised and relationships with pupils are positive. A wide range of creative strategies is being used to engage pupils' interest, including discussion and creative writing. Where RE is most effective, learning objectives are clear and lessons are structured to ensure that pupils can make good progress. For example, in the Year 1 lesson, the teacher used a range of stimulating resources to build on previous learning, encourage enquiry and develop pupils' understanding of how Christians worship.
- In lessons where progress is more limited, learning objectives and activities are not clearly matched to pupils' abilities. As a result, some pupils are unable to understand the task or develop a coherent pattern of learning in the subject. In other instances, activities lack challenge and do not sufficiently focus on the development of knowledge of religions. For example, when pupils produced poems on Easter which mainly focused on non-religious elements of celebration.
- The arrangements for marking and assessment are inconsistent. There are some instances of appropriate assessments set using the levels of attainment. These are marked with helpful comments about how to improve work. Elsewhere, marking does not indicate progress in RE with the only comments being about literacy skills. Some work is not marked. As a result, pupils are not clear about their success and what their next steps for learning are.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school follows the locally agreed syllabus closely. The non-statutory schemes of work accompanying the syllabus are used. School planning, however, has not secured sufficient balance between the two attainment targets. This has led to some loss of focus on RE-related objectives. As a result, pupils' progress has been hampered in developing an appropriate understanding of religious practices and beliefs.
- Some good use is made of 'blocked' units of RE taught over a short period of time. This has ensured that learning is more sustained and pupils can consolidate and expand learning.

- Some teachers are using agreed syllabus levels of attainment to plan for appropriately challenging activities. The levels are not, however, being used systematically across the school to inform planning. As a result, learning objectives and activities do not always match the abilities of pupils.
- Some good links are being forged within the community to enrich pupils' work in RE. For example, older pupils studying a unit on the journey of life had the opportunity to meet an ex-footballer who talked about his journey of life and faith. Younger pupils have questioned Muslim parents about their faith practices. The school has identified the need to extend these links further.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject is led by two teachers who took over the role last year. They have accurately assessed the current position of the subject in school and are clearly committed to strengthening its provision.
- Leaders have not systematically monitored the planning and teaching of the subject. However, some evaluation of provision has taken place which has led to improvements. For example, leaders recognised that the creative curriculum provision did not provide for coherent learning. This led to changes in the way that RE is delivered. Reports to parents have also been scrutinised and key issues for development identified, including inconsistent assessment practices and the lack of clarity among staff about the purpose of RE. A well-considered action plan has been produced based on this evaluation process.
- The opportunities for training among staff have been limited. This has led to a lack of shared understanding about the nature and purpose of the subject and how pupils can make progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring greater emphasis on developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices in religions
- using the levels of attainment to plan for appropriately challenging written and creative work
- devising a consistent approach to marking and assessment
- improving all teachers' expertise in the subject, and in particular, securing a shared understanding of the aims and purpose of RE.

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

Isobel Short
Additional Inspector