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Mr J Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Thomas

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 26 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Pupils enter the school with very little experience of religion or religious language. Consequently, they begin RE from a low baseline. By the end of Key Stage 1, they reach standards that are in line with agreed syllabus expectations and have made good progress. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 is in line with expectations and achievement overall is good, although pupils make better progress in relation to 'learning about religion' than in 'learning from religion'.
- Key Stage 1 pupils can identify some religious celebrations such as baptism and weddings and know how festivals such as Christmas, Easter, Diwali and Passover are celebrated. They can suggest the meanings of stories. They struggle with technical terminology but many delight in

learning new words when they are carefully modelled by, and rehearsed with teachers. For example, Year 1 pupils were very excited by the opportunity to learn Hebrew words for important Jewish artefacts.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are more confident in their use of technical terms. They can describe and explain the purpose of a range of features of religions and can give coherent accounts of Christianity and Judaism in particular. Their knowledge and understanding of Islam and Hinduism are less well developed. Pupils are beginning to make accurate comparisons between religions, for example comparing a synagogue with a church and recognising the similarities and differences between orthodox and reform synagogues. Year 6 pupils can also discuss comparisons between religious beliefs, for example Christian and Jewish beliefs about life after death.
- Pupils enjoy RE, although many of them find learning about religions quite difficult. In the lessons observed, pupils' behaviour was excellent and they were fully engaged in their learning. They enjoy talking about beliefs and ideas and this makes an important contribution to their spiritual development. RE also contributes well to their moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Three good lessons were observed. A strong feature of teaching is its consistency.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the local authority schemes of work. Lesson planning is very good and is based on clear learning objectives related to the attainment targets. Teachers make good use of a range of resources including DVDs and artefacts to bring the subject to life and heighten pupils' enjoyment.
- A particularly impressive feature of teaching is the way that teachers use a number of strategies to meet the wide range of abilities in their classes. They provide literary and visual resources at different levels of complexity, adapt tasks to meet pupils' levels of comprehension and literacy and make excellent use of their teaching assistants, who know very well the needs of the children they work with.
- Lessons are well structured to help pupils make progress. Reinforcement exercises and games are used to consolidate understanding of key ideas and aspects of different religions.
- Although some features of assessment are good, overall it is satisfactory. Teachers and teaching assistants provide clear records of what individual pupils have achieved, where pupils' literacy does not allow them to do so. Teachers take prior learning into account at the beginning of lessons. However, assessment of pupils' learning is not yet expressed in terms of the level descriptions for RE.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum is based on the new schemes of work accompanying the Devon, Torbay and Plymouth agreed syllabus. All statutory requirements are met.
- Because the school uses the Devon scheme, continuity and progression are strengths and the levels linked to the attainment targets underpin each unit. Some units are planned in a specific sequence to build on previous work.
- Teachers adapt the scheme to the needs of their pupils, generally very well. The only areas of weakness in the curriculum occur in relation to Christmas and Easter, which are taught to every class each year with limited difference across the year groups, making for weaker progression in these areas.
- RE is taught as a stand-alone subject and cross-curricular links are not yet well developed.
- Pupils benefit from some enrichment activities, particularly in relation to Christianity and Judaism. They visit local churches and the Plymouth synagogue and have opportunities to talk with community leaders.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The subject is led and managed by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable Year 1 teacher, who is up-to-date with local developments, notably the publication of the Devon scheme. She has worked very hard to provide curriculum folders for each class individually. These folders include planning and assessment documents, resources, useful internet links and additional subject knowledge for teachers. The quality of RE provision throughout the school depends in part on this central planning.
- The coordinator has undertaken some subject monitoring through a review of work and talking to pupils. She has also introduced a useful system for recording pupils' standards, which is linked to the attainment targets for RE but not specifically to the levels. Monitoring has led to the correct identification of priorities, which are reflected in the RE action plan.
- The coordinator has benefited from professional development in the past at the Plymouth Religious and Cultural Resources Centre, in particular training in the use of the Devon scheme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- incorporating opportunities to address attainment target 2 'learning from' religion more fully into teaching
- creating an even balance between teaching about Judaism, Hinduism and Islam and forging local links with these communities

- continuing to develop assessment practice.

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