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Mrs E Fitzgerald
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fitzgerald

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 14 June 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- While standards are below the expectations of the Sandwell agreed syllabus, pupils across the school make satisfactory progress.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils show an interest in elements of religious life and know about some key religious figures. The breadth of the pupils' religious vocabulary and language to describe their learning about different aspects of religion and belief is limited. In one lesson about the concept of light within a person, pupils responded with enthusiasm and interest but most found it quite hard to explain the significance of this feature of the religion.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils are beginning to identify a range of religious practices and know that some are common to more than one religion.

Pupils are also able explain the place of celebration and festival in their lives using appropriate simple religious vocabulary.

- By the end of Year 6, pupils make satisfactory progress in developing key knowledge and ideas which enable them to describe aspects of religious belief and practice in simple terms. Pupils have a growing understanding of the effects that the commitment to belief may have on their own lives and the lives of others. They are able to consider the key beliefs of the religions that they are studying and are able to make links with specific religious practices. Pupils' ability to undertake their own investigations into religion is more restricted. Moreover, limited use is made of extended independent writing in RE. As a result, the progress made by more able pupils is sometimes restricted.
- RE supports pupils' personal development effectively. It contributes well to their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. 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 opportunity to explore issues related to religion in the modern world.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- Lessons are typified by good relationships, mutual respect, humour and warmth. There is some unevenness in the quality of teaching. Learning is not always well matched to the varying needs of pupils. Planning makes insufficient reference to the different levels at which the pupils are working. Insufficient attention is paid to clarifying the learning outcomes of lessons and the overall direction and purpose of learning both within the lesson and within the wider units of work. On occasions, teaching does not consolidate learning effectively or make the links between different phases of the learning explicit enough. Some of the tasks are not challenging enough to extend the skills of older more able pupils. This slows progress because a minority of pupils are either not challenged enough or struggle to understand their learning.
- In order for pupils to respond to questions, the school has sought to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills by carefully guiding them through highly structured discussion activities. As a result, pupils respond sensitively to the values and concerns of others.
- Marking is satisfactory but few diagnostic comments are given to support pupils' learning in the subject. It does not enable the pupils to have a clear idea of how to improve their work or how to reach higher levels.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school meets the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The choice of faiths studied and visits to local places of worship provide a suitable breadth of experience.

- Long- and medium-term curriculum planning is unclear about the key focus, concept or question driving each unit or about the ways in which each unit builds on pupils' prior learning. The effect of this is to fragment learning and limit opportunities for more extended enquiries and cross-curricular links with, for example, English. Some of the more task-driven learning results from these limitations in the curriculum planning.
- Assessment opportunities are developing. The school has created a useful tool to assess pupils' attainment, based on the agreed syllabus and on the principles behind assessing pupils' progress. These recently introduced arrangements are a positive step in enabling teachers to understand the attainment level at which pupils are working. However, this information is not used to revise planning or to check pupils' progress to detect and address any potential underachievement.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject leader is keen and interested to improve her own and colleagues' subject knowledge. A clear RE policy is in place.
- A start has been made on self-evaluation, so that strengths and weaknesses have been identified. Nonetheless, judgements about teaching and the curriculum could be more evaluative and based on closer monitoring of the provision. There is scope to use the available data to analyse patterns of achievement more rigorously.
- The coordinator intends to focus very carefully on the teaching of key concepts and skills and the development of stronger cross-curricular links, particularly with literacy, to promote a clearer progression between individual units of work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- enhancing teachers' security and confidence in delivering RE through appropriate and targeted subject-specific staff development
- making the planning for progression more explicit within the curriculum
- using assessment to plan challenging activities which are more precisely matched to the needs of individual pupils.

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

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector