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Mr D Swann
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Swann

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 28 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.

- Standards in RE across the school are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils make satisfactory progress but there is some variability in this overall picture.
- Key Stage 1 pupils are able to retell stories from the Christian tradition and identify key words in Christian practice and belief. However, pupils' knowledge and understanding of other religions traditions are very limited.
- Pupils at Key Stage 2 can talk about their own beliefs and values and display sound knowledge of some religions and beliefs. They are developing an understanding of the similarities and differences between religions. Pupils are less secure, however, in relating this learning to the diversity of religious communities in the local region and Great Britain.

Some work lacks challenge and does not enable pupils to ask questions and develop skills of enquiry. As a result, progress is hampered.

- Pupils' attitudes towards RE are generally good. RE is making some contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- RE lessons are orderly and relationships with pupils are positive. Lessons are generally well structured to develop and sustain pupils' interest. For example, good use was made of paired discussions and role play to help pupils retell and understand the meaning of a Christian parable. A strength of the lessons observed was the opportunity given for pupils to share ideas and reflect on their own beliefs.
- Where progress is limited, this is usually because teachers' subject expertise is insecure. As a result, activities are not clearly focused on the subject-specific learning objectives and do not match differing pupils' abilities. In several instances, pupils are given low-level tasks and have little opportunity to engage in challenging, independent work.
- The school has identified the need to develop assessment and marking in RE. Marking does not indicate progress and does not enable pupils to be clear about their next steps for learning. Some work is not marked.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school follows the locally agreed syllabus and accompanying non-statutory schemes of work closely. Some planning is adapted to take account of school and pupils' needs. For example, coverage of specific religions is adapted each year to accommodate mixed-age classes. Generally, however, there is heavy reliance on the published schemes. As a result, teachers do not develop a clear understanding of how to plan in RE and ensure that there is balance between the two attainment targets. Little use is made of levels to inform planning and ensure that activities are challenging for all pupils. This is hampering pupils' ability to make appropriate progress.
- Some good use is made of 'blocked' units of RE over a short period of time. This has ensured that learning is more sustained and pupils can consolidate and expand knowledge of religious beliefs and practices. However, a lack of clear understanding about the nature and purpose of RE means that some of these links are tenuous and do not develop appropriate learning in RE.
- Some links have been made with local faith communities, although these could be extended to enrich pupils' work. Pupils have few opportunities to gain first-hand experience of other religions in the local area.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject leader is aware of current initiatives in RE and can assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. Actions are identified although they have not yet been implemented. A clearly defined policy outlines the main purpose of the subject and makes appropriate reference to the locally agreed syllabus. The subject leader has ensured that there is a range of resources to support RE although some of these need updating.
- Leaders have not systematically monitored teaching and learning in the subject. As a result, they are not aware of pupils' progress in RE or the level of teachers' subject understanding and expertise.
- The opportunities for training among staff have been very limited. This has led to a lack of shared understanding of the nature and purpose of RE across the school. For example, there is some lack of clarity about differences between personal development, collective worship and religious education.
- Leaders are aware of how RE can contribute to community cohesion. They intend to introduce opportunities for pupils to visit local places of worship although these have not yet been specifically planned.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teachers' expertise in the subject and, in particular, securing a shared understanding of the distinctiveness and purpose of RE
- monitoring the curriculum, planning, teaching and learning in RE regularly and using the findings to develop action points for improvement
- using the levels of RE to develop appropriately challenging activities and a consistent approach to marking and assessment
- developing opportunities for pupils to gain first-hand experience of the diversity of religion and belief within the local region.

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

Isobel Short
Additional Inspector