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22 July 2011

Mr D Walker
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Walker

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 12 July 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, pupils and the local vicar; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- The school is developing a robust process of monitoring pupils' progress in RE and the data confirm that standards in RE at the end of both key stages are broadly in line with the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus. This represents good achievement by the pupils, although there is some unevenness in the rate of progress that pupils make across the school.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have opportunities to explore a range of different features of religion, such as celebrations and stories. Children's progress is carefully monitored against the key RE-related early learning goals, particularly those related to social development and

knowledge and understanding of the world. This monitoring confirms the good progress made in these aspects of their development.

- Across Key Stage 1, pupils continue to make good progress. They are able to ask pertinent questions about religion. They develop a good knowledge and understanding of a range of, and similarities between, different religions. They are also able to offer reflections of their own life in the context of their work in RE.
- Throughout Key Stage 2, pupils develop a clear framework of terminology and a knowledge and understanding of a range of religions. Their knowledge of the key beliefs of different traditions is good; for example pupils in Year 6 can explain the reasons why the resurrection of Jesus is central to Christians. They can discuss issues which arise from their exploration of religion when, for example, pupils discussed whether in practice religions really live out the principle of equality.
- There is some unevenness in the pattern of achievement in RE. Occasionally, where the RE component of some of the integrated topics is less sharply defined, or tasks lack sufficient challenge, the rate of progress is more limited.
- Pupils like RE. They value the opportunities it provides to explore the diversity of beliefs and cultures in the world; they also enjoy the opportunities the subject offers to discuss issues which are significant in their lives. The subject makes a strong contribution to the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and community cohesion.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- RE lessons are well organised and good use is made of a range of resources. Teachers usually explain the direction of the learning carefully. Good use is made of questioning and pupils have opportunities to develop their own lines of enquiry from an early stage. In Year 2, for example, the pupils had the opportunity to identify a range of simple questions they would want to ask about Jesus prompted by looking at miracle stories.
- The pattern of work ensures that the subject contributes to the development of wider thinking and learning skills through the use of some challenging strategies and opportunities for pupils to reflect on their work. In one Year 5 class, for example, good use was made of a sequencing activity which stimulated pupils to discuss the importance of values in their lives. Elsewhere, use is made of creative activities, such as drama, to extend pupils' learning in RE.
- Occasionally, teachers are less certain of how to structure a clear process of learning in RE. Where this occurs, there is a tendency to lose focus on the core concepts or questions at the heart of RE. This can lead to opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own lives but sometimes this is detached from a structured investigation of religion and belief. The scope to develop pupils' literacy skills is sometimes limited when written tasks

lack challenge or are insufficiently differentiated to extend the more able pupils.

- Pupils' work is marked and the information about their progress is carefully recorded and evaluated on the school data monitoring system. While marking often has comments explaining the progress made, less reference is made to the next steps in learning.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The school is developing a creative approach towards the curriculum and is exploring how to incorporate RE within this model. Skilful use is made of a balance of subject-specific mini-topics alongside occasions where RE is integrated within wider topics. However, it is rare for RE to be one of the subjects which drives the choice of an overarching integrated theme, particularly at Key Stage 2.
- RE often benefits from this flexible pattern of delivery. The use of 'blocked' units supports more sustained learning. The integration of RE with other subjects provides some good opportunities to explore cross-curricular links and promote broader learning skills.
- Careful attention is paid to the requirements and guidance in the locally agreed syllabus. A balance is maintained in teaching a range of religions with an appropriate emphasis on Christianity. The school recognises that it is sometimes challenging to integrate some of the published exemplar material in the agreed syllabus within the creative approach to curriculum planning. Occasionally, the rationale for the inclusion of the subject within an integrated topic is uncertain and this can leave teachers unsure about how to structure the learning in RE. For example, sometimes the two areas of attainment 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion are not integrated effectively.
- The school has strong links with the local church and RE benefits from these. In addition, RE is often the focus of some of the wider activities in the school, such as its musical productions and festival celebrations. The school has sought to capitalise on the limited range of religions represented in the school to enrich learning in RE, but it recognises the need to extend the opportunities for pupils to gain first-hand experience of religious diversity.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE benefits from experienced subject leadership. The subject is well supported by the senior leadership. The strong teamworking approach to planning and assessment in RE, supported by the development of the creative curriculum and data monitoring system, provides a very positive context for joint planning, sharing practice and reviewing and moderating pupils' work.

- The school is developing a robust process for monitoring the progress of pupils in RE. Levels from the locally agreed syllabus are used to assess progress and this is carefully recorded. A good start has been made in analysing the information to help inform self-evaluation and action planning in RE. The current subject improvement plan has a strong focus on improving provision and raising standards.
- While the provision in the school meets statutory requirements, there is scope to explore further the flexibility within the agreed syllabus to ensure that the creative model of curriculum delivery in RE is not inhibited.
- Although the team approach to planning, informed by the good subject expertise of the RE coordinator, provides significant professional development opportunities, limited whole staff training has taken place in recent years. The school has found it difficult to access RE support from the local authority.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the curriculum to secure greater consistency in the quality of RE by:
 - extending the opportunities for pupils to engage directly with a wider diversity of local religious communities
 - reviewing the pattern of curriculum planning in the subject to ensure that the focus of learning is consistently clear through, for example, more effective use of key concepts and questions
 - ensuring that there is greater consistency in the use of writing in RE to secure challenge and meet the needs of all groups of learners.

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. 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 and SACRE.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector