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Mrs H Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Taylor

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 21 September 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 with some good and outstanding features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Attainment is average in both Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils generally meet the standards expected by the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus. Across the school pupils make satisfactory progress.
- Year 2 pupils can use correct terms to describe some features of Christianity and Hinduism, and are particularly knowledgeable about rites of passage, such as weddings and baptism. They can re-tell a few stories from these religions and know some moral teachings, such as the Ten Commandments.

- Year 6 pupils use a good range of vocabulary to describe aspects of the religions they have studied. They are well informed about the basic beliefs and practices of Judaism and Christianity but less so about other religions. Although pupils can make good progress in a single lesson or over one unit of work, this level of progress is not sustained because they find it difficult to make links between the different aspects of their learning. For example, although they have learnt about some aspects of Christianity each year, their overall understanding of the religion lacks coherence. This is due partly to the disjointed way in which Christianity is presented in the curriculum and partly to the inconsistent coverage of RE in different year groups.
- Younger pupils work enthusiastically in groups. The least able achieve as well as other pupils because they receive good support from teaching assistants. The more able develop good organisational, questioning and leadership skills. Year 6 pupils work very well individually or in groups and apply higher level investigative skills. In most classes, pupils develop their skills of oracy and literacy through RE.
- Pupils are generally interested in the subject. They can, when given the opportunity, link their study of religion and belief to their exploration of more personal reflections on issues of meaning and purpose. Progress is sound across a range of religions, beliefs and investigations. All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the context of RE are at least satisfactory. Occasionally pupils show creative or original responses in their subject work.
- Pupils generally enjoy RE and in both lessons observed pupils responded enthusiastically and with interest. They understand that there is a moral dimension to religions and are able to reflect on moral teachings in relation to their own experiences. For example, Year 2 pupils considered situations in which people might not tell the truth.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory with some good and outstanding features.

- The quality of provision is inconsistent across the school. At its best, teaching is good, characterised by good subject knowledge, careful lesson planning cross-referenced to the agreed syllabus, and the use of a wide range of high-quality resources. The Year 6 lesson observed was notable for the teacher's excellent use of questions to help pupils forge links between aspects of their learning about Judaism and for pupils' outstanding enquiry work using laptop computers with a Wi-Fi connection. In the best lessons, teachers encourage pupils' active participation and set a range of carefully structured tasks that enable them to make progress. Teaching assistants are well-deployed and provide good support for less-able pupils. In the Year 2 lesson observed, more-able pupils had good opportunities to work at their own level.
- Although the lessons observed were satisfactory or good, across the school teaching fails to take account of, or build on, pupils' previous

learning. The quality of questioning is also variable, sometimes lacking depth and focus. In the Year 2 lesson observed, questions that asked pupils to give concrete examples of abstract concepts were too difficult and they struggled to find examples beyond those modelled by the teacher.

- Plenary sessions during and at the end of lessons are used as informal opportunities for assessment, particularly self-assessment by pupils. Formal assessment has been restricted to the end of each year but is now under development to bring it in line with other subjects.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is under review in response to the newly published agreed syllabus. RE is planned within a thematic curriculum. In recognition that some themes do not provide sensible links with RE, the subject is sometimes taught in discrete blocks. The intention at the heart of this provision is that pupils will understand religions in the broader context of human experience and the world.
- At present, the curriculum does not have the intended impact on standards and achievement. Planning across Key Stage 2 is uneven. Long-term planning pays careful attention to RE in Years 3 and 6 but very little in Years 4 and 5. As a result, pupils in Year 6 had limited memory of previous learning in RE. In addition, the continuity in planning teaching about Christianity is not consistent and the way in which aspects of Christianity are taught across Key Stage 2 does not always secure pupils' sound understanding of the religion as a whole.
- The new planning in place to implement the new agreed syllabus is promising and has some good features. The school has an implementation plan with a good level of detail, incorporating a focus on securing progression and continuity. The Year 6 unit on Judaism offers a good model of focusing on a particular aspect of a religion but within the context of a general understanding of the key beliefs and practices of the religion. This approach is already leading to better coherence in pupils' understanding.
- Planning takes careful account of both attainment targets for RE and considers the contribution that the subject should make to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is currently satisfactory.
- The school tries hard to provide enrichment opportunities and has close links with local churches of different denominations. Pupils also benefit from Sikh and Jewish visitors.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject is led and managed by an experienced teacher. She is supported by a working group of four colleagues, two of whom have very good subject knowledge.
- The subject leader's training needs have been assessed thoroughly and a funded training programme put in place for her and for the whole staff. This is a particularly strong feature of management.
- A good start has been made on involving all staff in the evaluation of current provision and establishing an implementation and development plan for the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring consistent provision of the subject in all classes
- forging links between RE and the wider curriculum that are meaningful rather than contrived
- improving progression and continuity in planning aspects of each religion so that pupils build on previous learning and develop coherent understanding of religions
- monitoring to ensure that curriculum requirements are being taught to all pupils.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill
Additional Inspector