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Mrs J Ratcliffe
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ratcliffe

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 23 November 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; observation of two lessons and a meeting with a local faith representative.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with good features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory with good features.

- 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 within this overall picture.
- Key Stage 1 pupils use technical vocabulary well to identify some features of religion. They can link their study of religious material to reflection on their own ideas and experiences. For example, pupils could talk about the meaning of light in the Christingle ceremony and reflect on how light makes them feel. As a result, pupils at Key Stage 1 make good progress.
- Key Stage 2 pupils demonstrate some understanding of religious ideas. For example, pupils could talk about the nature of miracles. However, pupils become confused when using religious vocabulary and do not demonstrate an appropriately coherent knowledge of religious beliefs and practices,

including those of Christianity. As a result, Key Stage 2 pupils make satisfactory progress.

- Pupils' attitudes towards RE are positive. They enjoy the variety of activities and respond well to opportunities given for asking questions and collaborative learning. Pupils appreciate the importance of RE in terms of understanding diversity and respecting others. RE makes a positive contribution to the development of pupils' wider learning. For example, pupils are given the opportunity to develop the skills of independent thinking, speaking and listening.

Quality of teaching in RE

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

- RE lessons are well organised and relationships with pupils are positive. Good use is made of a wide range of activities and resources to engage pupils' attention and sustain their interest. A particular strength of teaching is the use of questioning to challenge and motivate pupils.
- Where RE is most effective, learning objectives are clear and lessons are structured to ensure that pupils can develop and consolidate new learning. As a result, pupils make good progress. Where progress is more limited, lessons lack a clear focus and do not sufficiently build on previous work. As a consequence, pupils are unable to develop a coherent pattern of learning in the subject and make superficial responses.
- The arrangements for marking and assessment in RE are inconsistent. There are some instances of assessment using the levels of attainment. These are marked with helpful comments about how to improve the work. Elsewhere, marking does not indicate progress in RE with the only comments being about the development of general skills. As a result, pupils are not clear about their success or their next steps in learning.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is heavily reliant on a published scheme of work with some reference to the locally agreed syllabus. On occasions, particular units of work are adapted but in ways which lose the focus of RE-related objectives. For example, a unit on moral dilemmas has been adapted to focus on what makes people good but with little reference to religious beliefs and teachings. The published schemes are not evaluated and developed sufficiently to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. This is hampering pupils' ability to develop a coherent and appropriate understanding of religions and beliefs and consider appropriate questions of truth and meaning.
- Strong links have been forged with local Christian groups who provide good enrichment for the subject. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils had the opportunity to ask a variety of questions to representatives from local churches. This motivated and challenged pupils. Pupils have few opportunities to gain first-hand experiences of other religions studied. The

school has identified the need to provide enrichment through visits to faith communities in the region.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good. As a result, the capacity for improvement is strong.

- The subject is currently led by you, as the RE leader has recently left the school. The leadership brings considerable commitment and enthusiasm to the subject which is shared by other staff. The current provision in RE has been evaluated. The key issues have been accurately identified, including the need to develop consistency in marking and monitoring progress and the need for a review of the current curriculum. The subject is well supported through subject-specific resources.
- The straightforward approach to monitoring RE includes all staff in lesson observations. Constructive comments are given for improvement. As a result, there is shared common purpose among those involved in teaching RE. Recent access to subject training has been limited and but the school is now addressing this.
- Leaders are aware of how RE can contribute to community cohesion, particularly in relation to local faith communities. They intend to introduce opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship from other faith traditions in the region.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- revising curriculum planning to ensure greater balance, coherence and progression in learning about religions and beliefs
- improving teacher expertise in planning coherent units of work with clear learning objectives
- developing opportunities for all pupils to gain first-hand experience of the diversity of religion and belief within the local region
- developing a consistent approach to assessment and marking to ensure that pupils are aware what progress they are making in RE and what steps they need to take for further improvement.

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

Isobel Short
Additional Inspector