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Miss S Percival
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Dear Miss Percival

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 13 March 2012 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 RE lessons and brief observation of lessons in geography and communication skills.

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 expectations of the locally agreed syllabus reflecting satisfactory progress by the pupils.
- The pupils' ability to ask questions and offer thoughtful ideas raised by religious material is a strength. Year 6 pupils, for example, could talk about evidence of the existence of God. Pupils are also able to work independently and with others to undertake simple enquiries. For example, Year 4 pupils used a variety of sources to research and compare Sikh and Christian weddings.
- However, pupils' ability to demonstrate an appropriately coherent understanding of religious beliefs and practices, particularly in Christianity

is limited. While pupils can identify the major religions represented in Great Britain, they become confused when talking about specific religions and practices. As a result, pupils generally make satisfactory progress.

- Pupils' attitudes towards RE are generally good. They enjoy the variety of activities used in lessons and recognise the value of RE in terms of understanding diversity and respecting others. Older pupils appreciate the opportunities given to think about their own experiences and beliefs.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- RE lessons are well structured to develop and sustain pupils' interest. Good use is made of a wide range of different learning strategies and resources to challenge and motivate pupils.
- Where progress is limited this is often because lessons do not sufficiently build on previous work and planning does not enable pupils to develop any depth of knowledge. In some instances, teachers' approach to the subject is not secure. There is some misunderstanding about the purpose of RE, with teachers making some assumptions about the truth of particular beliefs and values. As a result, pupils do not develop sufficient knowledge and understanding of religions and their impact for individuals today.
- The arrangements for assessment are developing. Teachers monitor progress during lessons and use responses to pick up any general misconceptions. There is some use of levels of attainment to assess individual work. However, although teachers mark pupils' work, comments do not indicate progress in RE. As a result, pupils are not clear about their success and what their next steps for improvement are.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Close attention is given to meeting the demands of the locally agreed syllabus including coverage of the core religions and the key themes as indicated in the syllabus. However, school planning lacks coherence, balance and progression. Planning for individual units of work indicates a high amount of content with reference to several religious traditions. As a result, learning can be superficial and pupils become confused between religions. Units do not always build sufficiently on each other to enable sustained learning. This is hampering pupils' progress as pupils are unable to develop an appropriately progressive understanding of particular religious traditions, including Christianity.
- The RE curriculum is providing opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some good links are being forged within the local area so that pupils can gain first-hand experience of local faith communities. For example, younger pupils visit the local church and Jewish heritage centre. There are planned opportunities for pupils to

reflect on their own spiritual ideas and beliefs, in particular through the introduction of enquiry-based learning and discussion lessons.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE leader currently teaches the subject to all classes. General leadership of the subject is shared among three teachers as part of a humanities team. They are aware of some of the issues currently surrounding the subject and are committed to strengthening its provision. For example, leaders identified that pupils' interest was not always sustained in RE lessons. As a result, they developed a variety of activities and resources to motivate, challenge and engage pupils. The subject is well supported through subject-specific resources.
- Leaders systematically monitor RE through a variety of approaches including consultation with pupils. Evidence is being used to produce an action plan to bring about improvement. There is, however, some lack of clarity among leaders about the level of teachers' subject knowledge and expertise, particularly in relation to the purpose of RE.
- Leaders are aware that recent access to subject training among staff has been limited and that this is having an impact on pupils' progress. They are currently addressing this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teachers' knowledge and expertise in the subject
- reviewing the curriculum for greater coherence and to ensure that it provides sustained learning and progression, particularly in relation to Christianity
- developing an approach to marking which enables pupils to understand how to improve their work and make progress.

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