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Mrs S Guertin-Bryan
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Dear Mrs Guertin-Bryan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on May 13 2009 to look at work in religious education (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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE, the visit had a particular focus on creative thinking in RE.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils in RE are broadly in line with expectations and their achievement is satisfactory.

- The standards reached by the pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are at, and sometimes above, the expectations of the agreed syllabus. Those at the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly in line with expectations. Achievement across the school in RE is better at Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2 and is satisfactory overall.

- By the end of Year 2, pupils retell Biblical stories very well and give detailed explanations for religious symbols. They can give several examples of the symbolic meaning of light in a variety of celebrations, such as Divali, Hanukkah and Advent.
- Across Key Stage 2 pupils acquire a satisfactory grasp of some key features of religion and, occasionally, recognise some basic similarities and differences, for example between Shabbat and Sunday. Year 5 pupils are developing a good understanding of the potential impact of religion on the lives of individuals and communities through their work on Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. However, progress is very variable between year groups and achievement is not even across the key stage. The pupils' written work in RE at this key stage is generally weak and it is mainly through talk that they demonstrate their understanding.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is satisfactory. They demonstrate interest in the subject and older pupils in particular show enthusiasm for discussion and debate. On occasions, the subject makes a good contribution to their spiritual and moral development but this is not consistent across year groups because pupils do not always have enough opportunities to explore their own beliefs and opinions. When the subject is taught well pupils engage enthusiastically with religious and moral issues and most demonstrate a genuine interest and respect for different religions and cultures.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- Teaching in Key Stage 1 is planned in accordance with the new agreed syllabus which has brought coherence to pupils' learning. This enables pupils to produce some good written work and make good progress. A Year 2 lesson was carefully planned so that pupils developed their understanding of why people usually behave differently in a church compared to other everyday settings.
- The quality of teaching at Key Stage 2 is inconsistent, and there are considerable variations between year groups. At its best, for example in the Year 5 lesson observed, teaching is rigorous, expectations are high and questioning is effective. The lesson provided particularly high levels of challenge for the most able pupils. Good use was made of discussion to challenge Year 6 pupils' thinking. In the lessons observed teaching assistants were used effectively to support lower ability pupils.
- Pupils' written work tells another story and illustrates the inconsistencies in RE teaching at Key Stage 2. The good quality of lesson planning by some teachers is not replicated in other year groups. Much of the written work involves recording facts and recounting stories. Very occasionally pupils are asked to make comparisons within or between religions; for example comparing

Methodist and Anglican churches. Most written work is set at Level 2. It is not purposeful and does not enable pupils to develop either their skills or understanding. Low level tasks include colouring in, drawing and filling in worksheets. There is too little attention to specific learning objectives for RE, notably making links between aspects of learning, identifying similarities and differences between and within religions, and interpreting forms of religious expression.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE curriculum is in a transitional period. The new Torbay Agreed Syllabus, sent to schools in September 2008, has been implemented to good effect at Key Stage 1. Key Stage 1 teachers are using the scheme of work published by the local authority as the basis for their planning. This has provided a secure and supportive framework which accounts in part for the higher rates of progress in Years 1 and 2. The published scheme now constitutes the scheme of work for the whole school, and will be implemented at Key Stage 2 next academic year. This will replace the existing scheme which lacks detail and is not sufficiently focused on standards.
- The school has taken the sensible decision to follow the published schemes for one year. Planned evaluation at the end of the year will indicate the extent to which the school needs to adapt them for its own needs.
- The school has developed a number of enrichment activities designed to provide pupils with the opportunity to gain first hand experience of Christianity and occasionally of Islam. Visits and visitors are popular with pupils.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The subject co-ordinator has been in post for two terms and in that short time has brought about key improvements, particularly at Key Stage 1 where he has concentrated his efforts.
- He is highly motivated, knowledgeable and thinks deeply about the subject. His initial evaluation of RE throughout the school resulted in astute judgements which contributed to the school's particularly accurate self- assessment of RE and well-focused priorities for development. The overall monitoring, reviewing and improvement planning arrangements for the subject are systematic.
- He identified as a priority the need to implement the Agreed Syllabus, including the assessments incorporated in the local authority schemes. He attended an agreed syllabus training day and attends the local RE

support group. As yet he has not had enough opportunity to extend the training to the whole staff.

- The co-ordinator is particularly aware of the small number of pupils in the school from minority faiths and cultures. His planning includes reference to the faiths of children in the classroom in addition to the religions prescribed in the agreed syllabus.

The use of creative thinking in RE

Orally, pupils have opportunities to be creative in their thinking about RE. But the subject leader is aware that at present they have insufficient opportunities to think about, and express, their own beliefs in a structured way. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to communicate their ideas through other forms of expression, although plans are in hand to forge closer links between RE, English and the arts.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards at Key Stage 2, initially through staff training accompanying the full implementation of the agreed syllabus
- improving the consistency of teaching across Key Stage 2, in particular by raising the level of challenge and extending the variety of written work
- implementing the assessment tasks in the agreed syllabus and continuing to monitor pupils' progress.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill
Additional Inspector