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Dear Ms Leggett

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 May 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 2 are broadly in line with expectations.
- Pupils develop knowledge and understanding of several religions over the key stage. Year 3 pupils learn about Hinduism and write brief accounts of the mandir and Hindu sacred texts. In Year 4 pupils are introduced to Islam, and in Year 5 Buddhism and Sikhism. In Year 6, where most progress is made, pupils enjoy learning about Judaism and

remember their learning very well. In all year groups pupils learn about Christianity.

- Although pupils acquire factual information at a steady rate they are slower to develop skills in RE. They consider characters such as Moses in order to identify the characteristics of a religious leader and compare the roles of Jesus and Muhammad. They consider why the church is important to Christians. Year 5 have done some good work on religion and the arts, identifying feelings associated with pieces of music and analysing a painting of Pentecost. This kind of work, though infrequent, shows their potential to achieve well.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is satisfactory. They demonstrate interest in the subject and engage enthusiastically in discussions on issues such as life after death. The subject can make a good contribution to their spiritual and moral development but this is not consistent across year groups because they do not always have enough opportunities to consider their own beliefs and opinions in relation to what they learn. When the subject is taught well pupils have the opportunity to show their genuine interest in, and respect for, different religions and cultures.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- Teachers are becoming accustomed to planning and teaching in accordance with the new agreed syllabus. In this period of transition the quality of teaching is variable, in spite of the fact that RE is taught by only three teachers.
- Teachers' subject knowledge overall is satisfactory. They are informed about the topics they teach but in both lessons observed pupils were given little factual information beyond that which emerged from pupils' responses to the teachers' questions. For example, Year 4 pupils comparing their experience of community values with Christian community values were hindered because they were unable to apply their knowledge gained in previous lessons.
- Teachers are making every effort to provide more opportunities for pupils' spiritual development, largely through lessons which focus on attainment target 2, 'learning from religion'. However, this has led to an unhelpful tendency to separate 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion with the result that 'learning from' operates in a vacuum rather than being a reflection on what has been learnt.
- The most able teachers use a wide repertoire of teaching activities. In a Year 6 lesson the teacher combined an imaginative resource with skilful questioning and a variety of discussion techniques to stimulate thoughtful discussion about life after death. Not all teaching matches this quality.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory with good features.

- The RE curriculum is in a transitional period. The new Devon agreed syllabus, sent to schools in September 2008, has been implemented to good effect in all year groups and accompanying schemes of work form the new RE curriculum. This has already made an impact, for example on the work on 'Faith and the Arts' in Year 5.
- At present RE is taught once a week as a 'stand alone' subject. There are plans to make closer links with other subjects, particularly English and the arts. Where these links exist the curriculum promotes creative thinking and responses.
- Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are popular and make a positive impact on pupils' learning. Year 6 pupils remembered in detail their visit to Exeter synagogue two terms ago. From this visit they learnt and retained information about Jewish practice and teachings which they compared with Christianity. Pupils remember Church visits well and also visiting Christian groups. These visits are part of a school drive to use RE to forge local community links, for example with nearby churches rather than the more distant cathedral.
- Assessment in RE is developing satisfactorily using the end of each unit assessment pieces, teacher assessment and accompanying contextualised level descriptions in the agreed syllabus. A simple form of recording levels allows pupils' progress to be tracked.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory with good features.

- The school's self-evaluation of RE as satisfactory is accurate and it rightly judges the capacity to improve as good.
- The subject is taught across the school by the part-time RE co-ordinator, the deputy head and a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA), who teaches about half of the lessons. This small team of three has the potential to work well but in reality the RE co-ordinator has limited opportunities to meet the others to plan and review together.
- Considerable time has been invested over the year in releasing all members of the RE team for local authority training in a determination that the new agreed syllabus should be implemented effectively.
- Development planning is appropriately focused on matters relating to agreed syllabus implementation, including the revision of curriculum and assessment. However, this has not yet had its potential impact on improving standards and achievement.

- Monitoring is good at school level. Senior managers have observed RE lessons and, particularly impressively, three school governors, one a member of SACRE, spent time in school looking at RE. They made helpful written comments.

The use of creative thinking in RE

Pupils are creative in their thinking in RE when opportunities occur but at present these are not provided consistently across the school. The most frequent examples of creative thinking are found when pupils exchange ideas, interpret stories and explain the meaning of symbols. Initial attempts to make links between RE and the arts have given pupils opportunities to think about different forms of religious expression.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring pupils make more consistent progress pupil throughout the school
- forging closer links between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion
- giving pupils more opportunities to investigate religions
- encouraging the three RE teachers to work more closely together as a team.

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