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Miss S Fisher
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Dear Miss Fisher

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit, on 23 September 2009, to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the RE, the visit had a particular focus on how far pupils are becoming effective learners 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

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

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Pupils' achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Most pupils across the school have a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the religions studied and they appreciate the importance of religion and belief in many people's lives. However, the ability to deploy higher level skills of enquiry is less secure, particularly among some older pupils.

- Pupils in Key Stage 1 are able to explore a range of religious stories and talk about their meanings. Most pupils can reflect on their own religious experiences, and have a simple understanding of such concepts as belonging, caring and sharing. In Key Stage 2, pupils extend their knowledge of different religions. However, limitations in the curriculum and teachers' subject knowledge restrict the depth of pupils' understanding and their ability to investigate, analyse and apply religious concepts.
- Attitudes towards the subject are positive. Pupils enjoy RE because 'there are no right or wrong answers'. They work cooperatively and listen appropriately to each others' point of view. The subject makes a satisfactory contribution to the pupils' personal development.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- In most lessons, pupils experience a range of approaches and this helps to sustain their interest. They respond appropriately to group and paired work and collaborate well with each other.
- Lessons are generally planned appropriately. Separate activities linked to the same theme are prepared for the four different year groups in the class. In some lessons, however, the activities planned for the older or higher attaining pupils are not challenging enough.
- Teachers manage class discussion satisfactorily. They make sound use of questioning and discussion to check pupils' understanding and progress, and to give them the opportunity to hear the ideas of others.
- Assessment opportunities are developing. The school has created a useful tool to assess pupils' attainment, based closely on the success criteria and expectations detailed in the agreed syllabus. However, on-going assessment is not systematically used to track pupils' progress or inform teachers' planning. Marking is a weakness; it is irregular and does not enable pupils to understand how to improve their work and develop their skills.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The long-term and medium-term plans are detailed. However, planning over-emphasises the subject content at the expense of developing the important skills of enquiry, investigation and evaluation.
- An appropriate range of activities is planned but too often worksheets are used to record outcomes for pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1. This does not extend the most able. There is a need to provide more opportunities for independent writing in RE, particularly for the older or more able pupils.

- There is a good range of activities to enrich the curriculum and there are strong links between RE and personal, social and health education.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- Despite your heavy teaching load and commitments as a headteacher, you have worked very hard work to develop the subject. You know what needs to be done to improve and your development plan provides a clear agenda for this.
- The subject has good capacity for further improvement. Clear links are being forged between the development of RE and wider initiatives in the school, particularly in relation to curriculum planning.
- Staff have had limited opportunities for professional development in the subject. However, the recent inclusion of RE in the planning for a more skills-based curriculum is proving a useful context in which to revisit this.

The extent to which pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

RE lessons and other activities are delivered in a wide range of ways, using ICT, art, drama and discussion. However, there is a need to ensure that lessons do not focus on practical activities at the expense of developing pupils' skills in investigating and engaging with religion. Sometimes pupils spend too long listening to the teacher, leaving them with limited time to carry out more extended independent work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- making more use of the level descriptors to plan work that builds on prior knowledge and skills and ensures greater progression, especially on the part of older or more able pupils
- developing more structured assessments to track pupils' progress.

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

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector