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Dear Mr Osborne

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme – religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 November 2009 to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how well 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 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

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Pupils' achievement in RE is satisfactory across the school. However, the pattern of progress that pupils make is very uneven, largely because of weaknesses in the RE curriculum.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1 attain broadly average standards. For example, they are able to explore a range of celebrations, worship and rituals in religion. Pupils can identify and name the key elements involved in the celebration of Christmas, Easter and the Jewish festival of Sukkoth.

- Throughout Years 3 to 6, pupils extend their knowledge of different religions. However, the depth of their understanding and their ability to investigate, analyse and apply religious concepts are limited because of weaknesses in planning. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils reach standards which are broadly in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus.
- Pupils work cooperatively and listen well to each other's point of view. RE makes a sound contribution to the pupils' personal development. However, they have a rather restricted understanding of their learning in RE. They can recall some basic information but have only a limited ability to talk about their understanding of the diversity of religion.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Teaching in RE includes a number of good features. Teachers use good stimulus activities to engage the pupils' interest and ensure they are involved actively in their learning. In the best lessons, activities are planned well, clearly structured and challenging, with questioning by the teacher that is well-focused. Careful attention is paid to linking the 'learning about' and 'learning from' aspects of the subject.
- Good use is made of group work to extend pupils' thinking. For example, pupils in Year 2 engaged in a useful mind-mapping exercise designed to extend their understanding of celebrations.
- While the best teaching secures good sustained learning which is based on clear objectives, occasionally these features are less evident. When this occurs, learning is less challenging and focused. Moreover, activities are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE curriculum is based closely on the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. However, the curriculum is less well-matched to the pupils' learning needs and its limitations are a significant factor which impedes the translation of good teaching into good achievement.
- The school is keen to extend the more creative approaches to the delivery of RE. The coordinator is aware that a new locally agreed syllabus is being developed and is, understandably, awaiting this before undertaking a more radical review of the RE curriculum. At present, most RE is delivered on a weekly basis in small units on a four-year rolling programme. As a result, learning sometimes tends to be fragmented.
- Some progress has been made recently in developing the familiarity of staff with the levels of attainment in the agreed syllabus. This has helped the subject coordinator to undertake some monitoring of the pattern of pupils' achievement and identify areas for improvement. However, limited

use is made of the levels in planning or assessment, and there is very little recording of pupils' progress in RE.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- There is a clear commitment to reviewing the arrangements for the subject and introducing more staff development once the new locally agreed syllabus has been launched. A good start has been made in exploring ways in which RE might be incorporated within the more creative approach to curriculum planning being introduced across the school.
- An appropriate policy for the subject is in place. A review of the outcomes of monitoring linked to a subject development plan has been established, demonstrating that senior leaders know and understand the subject's strengths and areas for development. This pattern of monitoring RE has not, as yet, extended to include observation of teaching.

How well pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

The school has made a start in exploring ways in which pupils can become more effective learners in RE. It has identified the need to find ways of integrating RE more effectively within its more innovative curriculum developments. However, these moves are at a relatively early stage of development. There are some useful examples of pupils being engaged in more challenging and creative ways of working in the context of RE. The recent introduction of strategies to develop thinking skills in group work is having a positive impact on the quality of learning in some lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving planning to secure a clearer focus on key concepts and more progression in the development of learning skills in RE.

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