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16 November 2009

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Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Shenton

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 4 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- While standards are below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus, pupils across the school make satisfactory progress. Pupils in Year 2 have developed some familiarity with a range of aspects of religion. They are aware that religion and beliefs are diverse, but have yet to develop confidence in talking about religious ideas. Their framework of language within which to place their learning about different aspects of religion and belief is limited. In one lesson about the symbol of light in religion, pupils

responded with enthusiasm and interest, but most found it quite hard to explain the significance of this feature of the religion.

- By the end of Year 6, pupils make satisfactory progress in developing key knowledge and ideas, enabling them to describe aspects of religious belief and practice in simple terms. Progress in relation to the area of attainment linked to 'learning from' religion is better than that in relation to 'learning about' religion.
- Pupils' ability to undertake their own investigations into religion is more restricted. Moreover, limited use is made of extended independent writing in RE. As a result, the progress made by more able pupils is sometimes restricted.
- RE supports pupils' personal development effectively. It contributes well to their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils are given time in lessons to reflect on their feelings and thoughts. All pupils show positive attitudes to the subject. Older pupils do not have enough opportunity to explore issues related to religion in the modern world.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Lessons are typified by good relationships, mutual respect, humour and warmth. Good quality displays relating to RE around the building also help to secure pupils' interest and enthusiasm for the subject.
- While much of the learning in RE is organised well and enjoyable, the range of skills pupils are required to use in investigating religion and belief and in organising their thinking, is sometimes, quite limited because of weaknesses in teachers' understanding of the subject.
- The purpose of lessons is shared carefully with pupils and teachers seek to check whether it has been understood and achieved. However, in practice, the structure of activities does not always ensure that the learning enables pupils to meet those objectives. Some of the tasks are not challenging enough to extend the skills of older, more able pupils. On occasions, the connections between activities are not clear or the use of 'creative' activities distracts from the RE focus of the lesson. In some classes, there is too much reliance on the use of worksheets which narrow the quality of the learning. Learning assistants and supported tasks are used appropriately to help those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is inadequate.

- Very great care has been taken to provide teachers with detailed lesson-by-lesson planning. However, the planning is less clear about the key focus, concept or question driving each unit or about the ways in which each unit builds on prior learning. Planning is based primarily on teaching

RE in six units a year, usually on a once-a-week basis. This fragments learning and limits opportunities for more extended enquiries and stronger cross-curricular links with, for example, literacy. Some of the more task-driven learning results from these limitations in the curriculum planning.

- While there are some opportunities for pupils to meet or visit representatives from religions in the local area, the school is aware that it needs to extend this provision.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- Monitoring has revealed that the very detailed and, at times, quite complex sequences of learning are not always easy to deliver. The RE subject leader is giving careful consideration to ways in which the planning might be adjusted to ensure that the curriculum meets the requirements of the very recently published locally agreed syllabus and that high-quality learning can be developed and sustained. The coordinator intends to focus on the teaching of key concepts and skills and the development of stronger cross-curricular links, particularly with literacy, to promote a clearer progression between individual units of work.

How well pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

The effectiveness of the strategies to enable pupils to become effective learners and to develop as creative thinkers in RE is variable. There are strengths with some good use of creative activity to stimulate interest and enjoyment. Puppet-making, dressing up, story-telling and imaginative use of information and communication technology are among the examples seen. However, when the creative activity is not fully integrated into the learning, this distracts from the main RE learning objective and slows pupils' progress. Learning is more limited in relation to developing pupils' critical awareness and their ability to use higher-level thinking skills in the context of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving planning and teachers' subject knowledge to secure a clearer focus on key concepts and more progression in the development of learning skills in RE
- using more challenging thinking skills and written tasks, particularly to extend the more able pupils
- extending the range of links with local non-Christian communities to provide pupils with more first-hand experience of religious diversity and support the promotion of community cohesion.

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