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Mr A Simpson
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Dear Mr Simpson

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 21 October 2010 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; 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.

- By the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, the standards reached by pupils are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. This represents satisfactory progress overall, although they make slightly better progress at Key Stage 1.
- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils know about some key features of Christianity and, to a lesser extent, other religions. For example, they can re-tell biblical stories, such as the parable of the lost son and can recall the events of Holy Week. Pupils use correct terminology when giving accounts of Christianity, such as God, vicar, bible and church and show some understanding of why religion is important in people's lives. Most pupils are beginning to recognise similarities and differences between

religions, for example between Diwali and Hannukah, understanding that people of different faiths can celebrate similar ideas differently.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 6, they have a broad knowledge of aspects of Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. They make good gains in factual knowledge and often give thorough and detailed accounts and descriptions of features of religions and religious stories. Occasionally, some pupils make good progress, such as in Year 6 where they study Jesus through works of art. But although they can recall elements of each religion studied, their broader understanding is often lacking because they do not appreciate how the separate elements of a religion relate to each other. They make occasional comparisons between religions but can get confused about the features of each. Pupils sometimes understand the impact of religion on people's lives. The overall picture at Key Stage 2 is one of inconsistency. As a result, although pupils occasionally achieve well, overall their progress is no more than satisfactory.
- Pupils' personal development is also satisfactory. Their enjoyment of the subject fluctuates, depending on the teacher's enthusiasm and the interest raised by the subject matter. The subject makes a sound contribution to pupils' awareness of diversity and to their understanding of spiritual and moral issues, although the dominance of factual learning limits this somewhat.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory.

- Both lessons observed were satisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge was sound and they used interesting visual stimuli to maintain pupils' interest. Lower ability pupils in Year 2 responded particularly well to a good group activity supported by focused questioning by teaching assistants. Year 6 pupils thoroughly enjoyed a lesson on religious art as a source of spiritual inspiration.
- Pupils made most progress when teachers helped them to make connections between what they were learning about religion and their own personal reflection. For example, in the Year 6 lesson observed, as well as offering interesting interpretations of paintings on a religious theme, pupils reflected on what the painting meant to them. At other times, lessons focused on 'learning about' religion or 'learning from' religion rather than an element of each. For example, in the Year 2 lesson observed, pupils thought about occasions when they experienced light and how it made them feel. In discussion, pupils could not say what this had to do with RE because they did not understand that this was the first in a series of lessons about the religious symbolism of light.
- A variety of different learning activities is deployed in RE including drama, fieldwork and art. There are many opportunities for more extended writing, which is commendable, but too often these opportunities lead to underachievement because the RE learning objective is set too low; typically requiring no more than re-telling a story or describing a feature of

religion. Pupils do not benefit from enough opportunities to carry out enquiries, which would extend their skills in RE.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision for RE meets statutory requirements but until recently has not been matched to the requirements of the current Devon Agreed Syllabus. The RE coordinator is working rapidly to adapt the school's existing scheme of work to the requirements of the 2007 agreed syllabus.
- The medium-term planning produced by the subject leader provides class teachers with a sound foundation for teaching. The units of work are set at progressively more challenging levels of difficulty as pupils move through the school, but are not yet linked clearly enough to the attainment targets and levels in the agreed syllabus.
- Planning incorporates a range of learning activities and draws on the school's good collection of RE resources. It takes careful account of the needs of pupils of different abilities.
- The school has good links with local churches. These links are not yet imaginatively exploited, for example as resources to aid pupils' understanding of the similarities and differences between Christian groups.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE subject coordinator is providing satisfactory leadership for the subject. She benefits from the strong support of the senior leadership team and from the very active involvement of some governors and local clergy in the development and review of the subject.
- Strong arrangements are in place to review the provision for RE. A clear set of priorities for improvement has been established, including implementing the agreed syllabus and developing a new assessment system, but these have yet to be set out in formal action planning. Monitoring has been identified as a priority and this starts from the advantage of an existing formal monitoring process for RE. However, although current monitoring focuses on pupils' attitudes to, and enjoyment of, RE it has little to say about their standards or progress.
- Teachers are well-supported through the clear scheme of work and the guidance of the subject leader, who has arranged for support to be made available to the whole staff from the local authority RE adviser.
- Sound progress has been made in developing existing assessment arrangements for the subject, which consist of reporting to parents but without reference to attainment targets or levels.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to revise the scheme of work so that it incorporates the knowledge, skills, understanding, themes and assessment objectives of the 2007 Devon Agreed Syllabus
- establishing progression, continuity and coherence in pupils' understanding of the religions they learn about. This may involve reducing the number of religions included in the scheme of work for Key Stage 2
- incorporating a wider range of challenging tasks and activities that focus on developing understanding and skills as well as knowledge.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill
Additional Inspector