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Mrs E Cornhill
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cornhill

Ofsted 2011–12 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 9 November 2011 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, pupils and a school governor; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Pupils' attainment is broadly in line with expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The pattern of progress made by pupils is uneven but satisfactory overall.
- Pupils at Key Stage 1 can identify some practices and words connected with religion. For example, Year 2 pupils are able to talk about the ways in which Hindus celebrate Divali.
- Pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 is uneven. There are some examples of pupils making links between beliefs and religious practices. Pupils can express their own ideas and feelings on moral issues, for example, whether pacifism is right. However, the emphasis on personal reflection is not linked effectively to learning about religion. As a result, pupils do not

demonstrate an appropriately coherent knowledge and understanding of religious traditions and beliefs.

- RE makes a positive contribution to the development of pupils' wider learning. For example, pupils are given the opportunity to develop skills of enquiry, listen to the views of others and use information and communication technology. Pupils recognise the value of RE in terms of respecting others and thinking about their own experiences and beliefs.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- RE lessons are orderly and relationships with pupils are positive. Lessons are generally well structured to develop and sustain pupils' interest. For example, Key Stage 2 pupils were given the opportunity to work in groups and use a variety of sources to research and think about a moral question. A range of stimulating resources is used to engage and motivate pupils. For example, pupils in Key Stage 1 used a variety of materials to create their own rangoli patterns.
- Where progress is limited, this is often because teachers' approach to the subject is not secure and the purpose of RE is misunderstood. In some instances, language used about religions is inappropriate. In other instances, learning objectives lack a clear RE focus or are not used to plan appropriate activities. As a result, pupils do not develop sufficient knowledge and understanding of religions.
- The school has identified the need to develop its assessment arrangements for RE. There are examples of teachers annotating planning to record pupils' progress. Some pupils' work is marked accurately using the levels of attainment. Elsewhere marking does not clearly indicate progress in RE. As a result, pupils are not clear about their success or their next steps for learning.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broadly based on the locally agreed syllabus. Core religions are taught at each key stage and the concepts for each religion are highlighted in planning. School planning does not, however, use the agreed syllabus programmes of study sufficiently to plan for a coherent understanding of religious beliefs and practices. There is a lack of balance between the two attainment targets. This has led to some loss of focus on RE-related objectives. As a result, pupils' progress is hampered.
- Some good use is made of 'blocked' units of RE taught over a short period of time. This has ensured that learning is more sustained and links are made with other areas of the curriculum. For example, Key Stage 1 pupils are learning about religious festivals within the wider curriculum topic of light. However, a lack of clear understanding about the nature and

purpose of RE means that some of these links are tenuous and do not develop appropriate learning in RE.

- Some connections are being forged with local Christian communities to provide enrichment for the subject. Pupils have few opportunities to gain first-hand experiences of other religions studied. The school has identified the need to provide enrichment through visits to a wider range of faith communities in the region.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- Leadership of the subject is shared among the teaching staff. The clearly defined policy makes reference to the locally agreed syllabus. The school has evaluated current provision in RE and has accurately identified some development priorities, for example the need to develop progression in planning and assessment.
- Leaders are aware of how RE can contribute to community cohesion. They intend to introduce opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship although this has not yet been specifically planned.
- Opportunities for training among staff have been limited. This has led to a lack of shared understanding about the nature and purpose of RE. For example, there is a lack of clarity about the distinctions between RE, personal development and collective worship. As a result, school evaluation of current curriculum provision is inaccurate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving all teachers' expertise in the subject, and in particular, securing a shared understanding of the distinctiveness and purpose of RE
- revising the curriculum to ensure that pupils develop progressive and appropriate understanding of religious beliefs and practices
- securing a better balance between 'learning about' religion and 'reflecting on' religion within the schemes of work
- developing opportunities for assessment, using the levels of attainment, so that pupils are aware of the progress they are making and the steps they need to take next.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Isobel Short

Additional Inspector