

RE monitoring visits: Autumn/Spring Term 2009/10

Introduction

This report is based upon visits to 10 schools – 8 primary, 1 junior and 1 secondary. As usual headteachers and teachers have been welcoming and most have been very well prepared for the visit. Some completed detailed self evaluation forms and some sent information beforehand.

Primary/Junior Schools

The picture from this sample raises a number of areas for concern and is not as positive as usual.

In at least 2 of the schools the co-ordinator is not a subject specialist and in 2 others there is no RE co-ordinator. As usual, the best RE is found in schools where RE is led and managed by subject specialists who receive good support from the headteacher. This ensures that the subject has a high profile. The worst scenario is in a school where all the RE at key stage 2 is taught by a supply teacher. This gives out a negative message about the subject. The newly appointed co-ordinator has little input and does not monitor what is being taught by this teacher. The headteacher has agreed that this is unsatisfactory and will make changes during this term. In another school all RE is delivered through a single themed week. There is no subject co-ordinator and a brief scrutiny of work revealed an over-reliance upon worksheets and a lack of clear learning objectives. The school's headteacher and assistant headteacher are now reviewing the arrangements for teaching RE and have stated their commitment to raising the subject's profile.

However, all the schools are using the Agreed Syllabus to plan work though not all schools take account of the four main concepts. Increasingly, effective links are made to other areas of the curriculum, e.g. art, literacy. Some schools' policies are out of date and in need of review and some contain inaccuracies, e.g. confusion between RE and acts of collective worship; misleading information about parental right of withdrawal.

In all schools an appropriate range of different faiths is being covered, though at least 2 schools in this group try to cover all the major religions at key stage 2. This tends to result in a 'scatter-gun' approach, with little depth to teaching and learning. Visits to local churches are well established in all schools and many have good relationships with local clergy who also contribute to acts of worship. Visits to other places of worship pose practical problems, though teachers recognise their value.

Assessment remains an issue. Not one school in this cohort has effective systems **that are used to judge standards**. Levels are not used consistently or effectively. There is often very little recorded work ('Well, RE's all discussion isn't it?' from one teacher!) and an emphasis on 'learning about' rather than 'learning from' religion. This is an issue even in the best schools. Some monitoring of teaching and of pupils' work takes place but this frequently has no real focus.

One of the schools visited had received a subject inspection from Ofsted in 2007. The inspection highlighted continuity/progression and assessment as areas for improvement. Little or no progress has been made on these issues. The headteacher is aware that this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs and has said he will address the problems as a matter of urgency.

Areas of strength

- Good RE where there is subject specialism.
- Overall, RE is well resourced.
- Positive attitudes from teachers and pupils.

Areas for development

- Assessment needs to be developed so that it provides co-ordinators with evidence about standards and achievement in RE.
- Schools must find ways to provide pupils with first hand experiences of faiths other than Christianity, e.g. visits out, visitors in, links with inner city schools.

Secondary School

The school received a subject inspection in 2007. The report drew attention to shortcomings in assessment and these have since been addressed. It is a strength of the RE department that it is staffed entirely by subject specialists. This no doubt made a significant contribution to the 'outstanding' judgement made about SMSC during the school's recent full inspection.

Acts of Collective Worship

It continues to be the case that schools value assemblies as a time for strengthening a spirit of community and celebrating achievement. Religious and moral themes for each day/week are generally put together by a co-ordinator or the senior management team. Most include pupil participation and opportunities for prayer and/or reflection.

Support for schools

This comes either as a request from the school or as a follow up to a visit.

Carres Grammar School – Support for new head of department.

Grantham The King's, Bourne Grammar, St Guthlac's – email support over a number of issues.

Other

1. Training: RE for HLTAs – 6 day course during autumn term – so successful it is being run again in autumn 2010.
2. Ran workshops for Paulette Bissell's 'Passionate about RE' training day.
3. January training day: RE and thinking skills – Skegness cluster
4. Ongoing development of storysacks.
5. Attended meeting of Horncastle Cluster Group (secondary).

REsilience Project

The project aims to provide training and support for secondary school RE teachers in dealing with contentious issues – especially those linked with violent extremism. The roll out of training to approximately 700 school begins in the autumn term. A pilot study will take place this term and includes two Lincolnshire schools – St Christopher's and Horncastle Grammar.

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