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Mrs Ruth Nottingham  
Headteacher  
Royal Cross Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Nottingham

**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 30 November 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 good.

**Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is good.

- Royal Cross is a community special school for deaf children. All pupils have a statement of special educational need which covers a wide range of communication needs. Most pupils are hearing impaired but a significant minority have autistic spectrum disorders or speech, language and communication difficulties. While attainment in RE is well below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus, the achievement of the pupils is good, particularly in Key Stage 1. The school's assessment data indicate that few of the pupils reach the formal levels set out in the agreed syllabus but effective use is made of the 'P' levels to track their progress.
- The very varied abilities and needs of the pupils mean that there is no straightforward overall pattern of achievement in RE. The most able pupils

in Key Stage 1 are working at a level broadly in line with expectations. They can identify and talk about key features of religious festivals, making links between these features and identifying similarities and differences between religions.

- The attainment of many of the pupils in Key Stage 2 is more constrained but they are making good progress in developing some of the more basic skills of communicating and discussing their feelings. They find exploring religious material more challenging and their progress in that regard is more limited.
- Pupils make particularly good progress when they have the opportunity to explore the community religions represented in the school and have a 'hands on' approach to RE. Overall progress in RE across the school is good, although the development of their understanding of features of the Christian tradition is less secure.
- Pupils enjoy finding out about each other's religions. RE makes a strong contribution to the development of their sense of diversity. It is also effective in promoting wider emotional, social and communication skills, and a sense of self-confidence and value. One older Hindu child, for example, was particularly pleased to find out what some of the younger children had discovered about his festival of Diwali.

### **Quality of teaching of RE**

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Teaching in the lessons observed shared a number of strengths. Activities are very carefully structured to help the pupils make small steps in learning, work together effectively, and maintain interest and focus.
- Good use is made of practical, visual and first-hand experience to help the pupils engage with the material and ideas that they are exploring. Teachers use a variety of approaches to enable pupils to communicate their thoughts and demonstrate what they know and understand. A particular strength is the use made of photographic and DVD evidence to record pupils' experience in RE and stimulate further learning.
- Learning objectives are set out clearly and, in the best practice, are very carefully differentiated to meet the needs of groups and individuals. Some good use is made of in-class support to ensure that all pupils can participate in the lessons.
- Teaching is particularly effective when the curriculum is closely matched to the pupils' needs. This is most evident in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

## **Quality of the curriculum in RE**

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- Very close attention is paid to adapting and implementing the programmes of study in the locally agreed syllabus although there is a need to ensure that the requirements are adjusted more effectively to meet the needs of the pupils at Key Stage 2. A careful, four year long-term plan is in place to support this coverage. The breadth and balance of the RE curriculum match the expectations of the syllabus.
- Clear understanding exists of the need to balance and integrate the two main attainment targets of RE, but also a recognition that this is challenging for the pupils. The school rightly focuses on first-hand experience and the community religions represented in the school. Where this approach is adopted, the impact on pupils' learning is very positive. Strong links are also forged with circle time and the wider personal and social education programme.
- There is some careful integration of RE within the school's innovative creative curriculum model. Where appropriate, RE is taught as a stand-alone subject although these situations are at Key Stage 2 where the match of work to the pupils' needs can be less effective. Occasionally, in some of the planned units on Christianity, for example work on miracles and parables, the planning is less effective because there is limited emphasis on first-hand experience and the ideas being explored are too complex and detached from the pupils' experience.
- Some good use is made of connections with the local community to enrich the pupils' learning in RE. A very successful visit took place recently to a local Hindu mandir and there are strong links with a local Catholic church. The school has found it more difficult to forge links with Muslim communities in the area and this is a target in their RE action plan.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good with outstanding features.

- RE is led by an experienced and enthusiastic coordinator who has a very good grasp of the subject and how it can be adapted to enrich the pupils' learning. The arrangements for managing the subject are impressive as represented by the careful systems for tracking and recording of the pupils' progress.
- The long-term plans for the RE curriculum achieve a balanced programme and a sound basis for the more detailed planning by the teachers. Teachers plan collaboratively with a strong emphasis on adapting the curriculum to meet the changing needs of each cohort of pupils.
- There is a pattern of informal monitoring of the subject which the school plans to strengthen. This intention, together with a number of other

relevant and appropriate action points, is incorporated within a clear subject improvement plan. The subject is well resourced.

- There is a strong link between the approach and provision for RE and the wider values and ethos of the school. As such, the subject makes a very positive contribution to the commitment to inclusion and the promotion of community cohesion.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- developing the RE curriculum at Key Stage 2 to:
  - ensure that it matches the needs of the pupils more consistently
  - provide a more relevant and accessible approach towards the pupils' learning about Christianity.

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

**Alan Brine**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**