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Mr M Woodburn  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Woodburn

**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 September 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: observation of four lessons; curriculum planning; interviews with staff and pupils; and scrutiny of assessment records.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

**Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards across the school are in line with those outlined in the Cumbria agreed syllabus. Pupils in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 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 underdeveloped.
- While there is some variability in the progress that pupils make in RE across Key Stage 2, overall achievement is satisfactory. By the end of Year

6, pupils make satisfactory progress in developing key knowledge and ideas, which enables them to describe aspects of religious belief and practice in simple terms.

- Progress is limited because the learning does not allow pupils to develop a deep and systematic knowledge of the religions studied. Some pupils are able to develop lines of enquiry and undertake independent research into some aspects of religion. Older pupils are becoming more adept in their use of higher order skills of investigation, enquiry and interpretation in relation to religious material. Elsewhere, where pupils' progress is more modest, activities tend to focus on gathering information about religion rather than investigating questions that are more challenging or exploring their ideas about religion. Moreover, limited use is made of extended independent activities in RE. As a result, the progress made by more able pupils is sometimes restricted.
- RE makes a positive contribution to the pupils' wider personal development. It makes a considerable contribution to their understanding of, and respect for, diversity. On occasions, pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and come to personal judgements about matters being investigated. As a result, they develop the confidence to express themselves orally; however there is scope to extend this to their written responses.
- Pupils enjoy the subject and respond with enthusiasm to the opportunities that it provides to participate in some challenging and engaging activities. For example, Year 6 pupils were keen to discuss whether religion has a place in modern society. Behaviour and attitudes to learning in RE lessons are good.

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

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory.

- Teaching and learning in RE involve a number of good features. Teachers use good stimulus activities to engage pupils' interest and ensure that they are actively involved in their learning. Good-quality displays related to RE around the building also help to secure pupils' interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Effective use is made of opportunities for reflection. Lessons are typified by excellent relationships, mutual respect, humour and warmth.
- In the best lessons, activities are planned carefully, structured clearly and challenging, with questioning by the teacher that is well-focused. Good use is made of group work to investigate open-ended questions designed to extend pupils' thinking. For example, pupils in Year 6 engaged in a useful exercise designed to extend their understanding of how a moral code is often used to bind communities together.
- While the best teaching secures good, sustained learning which is based on clear objectives, occasionally these features are less evident. When this

occurs, learning is not as challenging and focused. Moreover, activities are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils.

- Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly. Emphasis is placed on developing a range of assessment strategies to ensure that all pupils can make progress. Tasks set are generally purposeful and varied.

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

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Some useful examples exist of pupils being engaged in more challenging and creative ways of working in the context of RE. The recent introduction of strategies to develop thinking skills in group work is having a positive impact on the quality of learning in lessons.
- Detailed long- and medium-term plans are in place. However, planning overemphasises the subject content at a basic level at the expense of making each unit of work more challenging in terms of developing the important skills of enquiry, investigation and evaluation.
- Some good opportunities exist for learning outside the classroom and enrichment activities linked to RE. Good use is made of the local faith communities and those that are further afield to support learning in RE. The school has very strong links with schools and communities in India and Tanzania, engaging in regular exchange visits between staff from each school.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The recently appointed subject leader is enthusiastic and is keen to develop the subject. She has made a good start. For example, she has conducted an audit of the current provision and teachers' skills. An appropriate policy for the subject is in place. A review of the outcomes of monitoring linked to a subject development plan has been established, demonstrating that senior leaders know and understand the subject's strengths and areas for development.
- Appropriate strategies are in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision, including the involvement of the governing body. A well-focused improvement plan for the subject is in place with a set of clear and appropriate priorities targeted on improving provision and raising standards.
- The arrangements for professional development are good, with teachers regularly attending training provided by the local authority. However, some initiatives have yet to be implemented fully.
- The arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are sound with the analysis of assessment data used appropriately. However, less use is made

of information in relation to different groups of pupils, to evaluate their achievement. Moreover, the use made of the information gained from assessments to plan increasingly challenging work is less successful.

- The subject has good capacity for further improvement and clear links are being forged between the development of RE and wider initiatives in the school, particularly in relation to curriculum planning and community cohesion.

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

- considering including the systematic teaching of thinking skills and the use of levels to plan work, to secure greater challenge in pupils' learning.

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 published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to SACRE and your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Jacqueline Wordsworth**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**