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Mrs Amanda Beanland
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Beanland

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 our visit on 7 December 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 a range of lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards in RE across the school are broadly in line with expectations of the locally agreed syllabus, reflecting satisfactory progress by the pupils.
- There is some variability within this overall picture. The pupils' ability to reflect on their personal experiences and offer thoughtful ideas about some important religious concepts is a strength. Year 6 pupils had, for example, produced some impressive artwork and extended writing which expressed their thoughts about the nature of God. Similarly, pupils in Year 2 offered personal reflections on the experience of giving and receiving gifts.

- However, pupils' knowledge and understanding of religions and beliefs and their ability to use more demanding skills of enquiry into religious material and issues are limited. As a result, the more able pupils in particular are not being challenged sufficiently. Pupils' ability to discuss some of the more controversial issues raised by religion is restricted as is their appreciation of the nature of religion in Britain today.
- The attitudes of pupils towards RE are generally good. They enjoy RE and respond well when opportunities are provided for more independent or collaborative learning. For example, Year 6 pupils worked well in pairs and groups when exploring a range of artists' representations of the Christmas journey. The contribution of RE to the development of pupils' literacy skills is more limited because they do not have enough opportunities to use a wide range of genre when writing in the subject.
- The subject makes a strong contribution to the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It promotes a positive attitude towards cultural diversity and provides pupils with a range of opportunities to explore aspects of their personal experience.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory.

- RE lessons are orderly and well organised. Relationships with pupils are positive and good use is made of a wide range of different strategies to engage pupils' attention and sustain their interest. A particular strength of the teaching is the opportunity provided for pupils to express their personal responses to the learning.
- In the best lessons, where there is a clear focus on developing the skills of enquiry, good use is made of questioning and stimulating resource material to challenge pupils to think and make decisions about their learning. In these lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of the appropriate approach to adopt when teaching RE.
- Elsewhere, where progress is more limited, this is often because the approach adopted towards the subject is not secure or the lessons are not clearly focused on subject-specific objectives. Although these are shared with pupils they are not always matched well to their abilities and do not involve a coherent pattern of learning in the subject; in some cases they tend to make assumptions about the beliefs of the pupils. Where this is the case the structure of the pupils' learning is not clear or progressive. Too often, for example, pupils are being encouraged to explore personal opinions or responses to ideas or experiences before they have had enough opportunity to investigate the nature of the related religious material.
- The arrangements for assessing pupils are developing. A range of approaches is being trialled to record progress. At present few specific assessment tasks have been identified and, although there are

opportunities for pupils to assess their own work, the tracking of attainment against the levels in the agreed syllabus is not secure. In part this reflects uncertainty among the teachers about how to interpret and apply the levels. While teachers do mark pupils' work, feedback does not always focus on providing clear targets for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Close attention is given to meeting the demands of the locally agreed syllabus. The non-statutory schemes of work that accompany the syllabus are followed in detail. Care has been taken in decisions about the breadth of content and the balance of work across the two areas of attainment specified in the syllabus. Specific religions are revisited across the school to provide continuity and progression in pupils' learning.
- In practice, however, the published schemes are not being evaluated and developed sufficiently to ensure that they match the pupils' needs or reflect a clear process of learning which integrates the two areas of attainment effectively. On occasions, for example, the schemes are being adapted but in ways which either lose the focus on RE-related objectives or revert to a model which assumes a pattern of belief among the pupils.
- A variety of approaches is adopted to the delivery of RE, depending on the topic. Often it is taught weekly but on occasions it is blocked or integrated with work in another subject area. The school relies on delivering one unit of RE each half-term which limits the opportunities for sustained investigative work and tends to fragment the learning.
- Strong links have been forged with a variety of local Christian groups who provide good enrichment for the subject. Access to communities from non-Christian traditions is more difficult to achieve but good use is made of a local Hindu family and wider links with the Indian sub-continent. The school has identified the need to extend these links further.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory with good features and a good capacity for improvement.

- RE benefits from the leadership of a coordinator who has a wider advanced skills teacher role in humanities and is a member of the local SACRE. She brings considerable enthusiasm, commitment and a sense of vision to the subject. Many aspects of the management of the subject are good including the organisation of the curriculum, the provision of resources including electronic materials, and the straightforward approach to monitoring the subject. The subject has benefited from involvement in a Spirited Arts project and the coordinator has succeeded in forging links with the RE department in the local secondary school.

- A review of pupils' work and the quality of teaching in RE takes its appropriate place in the cycle of subject monitoring. This, together with the wider evaluation of the subject, has enabled the coordinator to form a clear view of many of the strengths and weaknesses in RE. However, limited use is being made of reliable data about pupils' attainment and as a result the limitations in the quality of learning 'about' religion have not been fully appreciated.
- While teachers have had good opportunities for training in RE, with a full day's inset provided earlier this year, there is still some way to go in establishing a clear, shared understanding of the nature of, and approach towards, learning in RE. The heavy reliance on the exemplar published scheme of work is limiting the ability of the teachers to plan RE work independently.
- The subject makes a strong contribution to the wider values and commitment to equality of opportunity within the school and to the personal development of pupils. The contribution to the promotion of community cohesion is strong, particularly in terms of the local and global aspects of community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the teachers' expertise in the subject and, in particular, securing a clear, shared understanding of the approach to learning in RE which is embedded in the locally agreed syllabus
- providing a stronger focus on an enquiry approach to learning in RE and, in particular, extending the level of challenge for the more able
- reviewing the curriculum for RE to ensure that it provides for more sustained learning and a more reliable integration of work across the two main areas of attainment specified in the agreed syllabus.

We 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
Isobel Short
Additional Inspector