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8 June 2011

Mr D Magee
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Dear Mr Magee

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 24 May 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 and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with a number of good features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- The standards reached by pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils' progress is variable across the school and is satisfactory overall. Most progress is made where they are encouraged to explore religious material more independently and where the purpose of learning has a clear subject focus.
- In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils develop familiarity with aspects of religion but the material which they encounter is not always placed clearly within the context of religion. As a result, their understanding is relatively fragmented and their ability to use subject vocabulary is limited. In one good lesson, pupils engaged in a challenging

task exploring the significance of the actions of characters within the story of Moses. However, they had very limited grasp of the religious context of the material.

- Across Key Stage 2, pupils develop a good basis of knowledge of a range of religions. In one lesson, pupils were investigating the significance of Buddhist worship generating their own questions and demonstrating a good understanding of the links between different aspects of belief and practice. They can make sensible comparisons between religions and, by Year 6, can talk sensibly about a wide range of faiths. Their grasp of the key features of Christian belief is good. However, this pattern of good progress is not sustained in all year groups or across all aspects of the subject. Their ability to discuss and debate issues related to religion and belief is more limited and the progress made in some classes is constrained by an overemphasis on lower level written tasks.
- Pupils enjoy RE and respond positively to challenge when this is provided. They can see the value of the subject and find exploring different religions stimulating. At its best, the subject makes a very positive contribution to the development of pupils' wider thinking and learning skills. A good contribution is made to their wider spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Links between the RE programme and work developing meditation techniques are particularly effective as illustrated by the impact on their learning about Buddhism in Year 5.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- In all the lessons seen, the classes were well-managed and relationships with the pupils were positive. When given the opportunity, pupils responded well to the opportunities to work independently and collaboratively.
- At its best, teaching is challenging with a strong sense of enquiry driving the learning. Good support is provided to enable all pupils to make effective progress. The direction and purpose of the learning are well suited to the subject and made clear to the pupils. They have opportunities to recap prior learning and build further. Good use is made of questioning to prompt thinking, and learning is well structured.
- Where teaching is less effective, the range of activities and the opportunities for writing are limited and lack challenge. There is an overuse of worksheets and clozed procedures exercises. On occasions, the purpose of the learning in relation to RE is not clear enough and opportunities to extend the pupils' subject vocabulary are missed.
- Much of the marking of pupils' work in RE is good although this is not fully consistent. At its best, pupils are given clear advice about how to move their thinking on and a sense of dialogue about their progress is generated. Wider assessment arrangements are more limited.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- A key factor which constrains the good teaching from securing good overall progress is the limitations in the curriculum. The school follows the previous locally agreed syllabus very closely. A new syllabus was launched the day before the inspection and the school has identified the need to use the greater flexibility this provides to review its current provision.
- At present, there are no school-generated mid-term plans for the subject. Teachers plan lessons directly from the ideas produced by the local authority but these are not explicit about learning objectives, attainment targets or levels of attainment. As a result, there is inconsistency in the effectiveness of the teaching. Where teachers have a good understanding of the subject, lessons are effective but this is not always the case. There is some repetition across the year groups and the progression in pupils' learning is not always clear. Sometimes, the links between the two areas of attainment, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion and belief, are not clearly defined.
- The school currently delivers RE, weekly, in six half-termly topics. On occasions, though not always, this has the effect of fragmenting learning and limiting the cross-curriculum links. Some good links are made with literacy and the structured development of speaking and listening skills.
- Increasingly, the school is drawing on contacts with the local religious communities to enrich the pupils' learning and extend their wider cultural development. For example, Year 6 pupils have benefited from links with the Sikh faith and visited the local Gurdwara. Some lessons with pupils, in upper Key Stage 2, have been led by a representative from a local Christian group and they found these stimulating and enjoyable.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject leader's role is clearly defined and undertaken by a committed and experienced teacher. The responsibilities are fulfilled carefully and the statutory requirements for the subject are met. There is a clear policy for the subject. However, subject training for the RE leader and the wider staff has been very limited; RE has not been a development focus in recent years.
- The procedures for monitoring, auditing and developing the subject are followed but overall the process lacks rigour. Monitoring does not, for example, focus sharply on pupils' attainment and progress. Similarly, the subject development plan emphasises tasks to be completed rather than raising standards in RE. The assessment arrangements are not well-established or implemented consistently.
- RE has benefited from the drive to raise the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The introduction of a more flexible curriculum with stronger links between subjects is seen as a further context for

developing the subject although thinking is at an early stage in relation to RE. The launch of the new syllabus is providing a further impetus to this timely development work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- securing greater consistency in the quality of RE across the school by:
 - developing stronger school-based medium-term planning which more clearly identifies the purpose and pitch of the work
 - making greater use of the attainment targets and levels in the agreed syllabus in planning and assessing RE
 - sharing the best practice in enquiry-based approaches to the subject more widely across the school
- reviewing the curriculum to ensure that there is greater continuity and progression in the pupils' learning
- developing a straightforward and manageable approach to assessment in RE
- providing a more rigorous and well-focused approach to self-evaluation and improvement planning in RE.

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 your local authority and SACRE.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector