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Mrs M Lee
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Dear Mrs Lee

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 22 June 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 good with some outstanding features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good with some outstanding features.

- Standards in RE are above average at the end of Key Stage 1 and broadly average by the end of Key Stage 2. This difference is partly accounted for by variability in the overall ability of the pupils across the school. Pupils' progress is good overall and is outstanding in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 quickly develop their ability to talk about religion and belief. Building on their own religious background within the Muslim faith, pupils are able to identify differences and similarities between different religions. They can use a wide range of technical language when, for example, discussing the features of a church. Most notably they demonstrate an understanding of

the significance of features of religious practice, such as prayer or the use of water in baptism and Muslim ablution.

- Pupils in the lower Key Stage 2 build quickly on their previous learning. They are able to identify and discuss confidently questions raised by their study of religion. For example, one Year 4 class drew on their own experience and wider learning to explore a wide range of questions about the nature and purpose of prayer. They are being challenged well to explore the place and significance of religion in daily life.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 5 and 6 although the range and depth of their knowledge and their ability to discuss and debate issues related to religion is slightly less secure. For example, pupils found it quite difficult to explore issues related to the truth and meaning of creation stories.
- RE makes a very strong contribution to pupils' overall personal development. In particular, it supports their understanding and appreciation of diversity. They learn to value the beliefs and lifestyles of others in line with the overall school focus on respect. The subject also supports their spiritual development using opportunities for reflection to enable the pupils to express their feelings and personal responses to aspects of the religious life and deeper areas of human experience.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good with outstanding features.

- At its best, teaching is challenging and stimulating. Teachers have good subject knowledge and can use questioning very effectively to extend pupils' thinking. Learning is very well structured with a clear purpose which is carefully explained to the pupils. Activities are well organised and good use is made of a range of stimulating resources. A range of well-considered strategies is used to maintain pace, engage pupils actively in their learning, and promote collaboration and reflection.
- Specifically, very good use is made of a range of whole-school strategies designed to build pupils' learning and match their varied needs. These are successfully embedded in RE lessons helping to secure the very positive progress.
- Occasionally, where the purpose and structure of the curriculum planning are less well defined, the flow of activities can lose direction and learning is more limited.
- Assessment practice in RE is at an early stage of development. While good use is made of questioning in lessons to check pupils' understanding and progress, there is little summative assessment or formative marking of pupils' work. Although a start is being made in annotating planning to record pupils' achievement, learning objectives are not differentiated sufficiently to support this process.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The school fully meets the statutory curriculum requirements of the Oldham agreed syllabus. The pattern of the scheme of work is carefully designed to respect and build on the Muslim background of the pupils to deepen and extend their understanding of religion and belief.
- The structure of the planning is often of good quality with careful attention paid to encouraging enquiry and independence of thought. Many of the units are challenging and stimulating although occasionally the focus and progression of learning through a topic are less clearly defined. The scheme reflects a good breadth of study across different religions and the two key areas of attainment: learning about and from religion. Learning objectives are usually not differentiated and, while in practice teachers do adjust the learning to ensure that all pupils' needs are met, this feature of planning does not aid effective assessment.
- Very effective use is made of the local community to enrich the pupils' learning through visits and visitors. In particular, RE links with another local church school provide a very positive opportunity to promote understanding and mutual respect.
- The school has recognised it needs to ensure that the balance of work across different religions is kept under review so that the pupils' natural tendency to focus on Islam is not overemphasised. Similarly, as part of its wider review of the curriculum, the school is rightly keen to review the model of delivery of RE to ensure that it promotes the most effective learning and stronger cross-curricular links, especially with literacy.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The leadership of RE is distributed across the unit team leaders. This ensures that RE is built into the wider thinking about the curriculum. Other members of staff also take a lead in promoting and supporting subject development. There is a strong commitment to the subject and the contribution it makes to the school's drive to promote community cohesion, to encourage reflection and to develop the value of respect.
- A clear action plan is in place which is focused on raising standards and improving provision. RE is monitored as part of the generic evaluation of foundation subjects, although this does not provide a sharply focused analysis of the subject's effectiveness.
- A strength of the leadership of RE has been the emphasis placed on developing community links and securing the confidence of the Muslim parents in the way that RE is delivered.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing, as part of the wider curriculum developments:

- the balance of work on different religions across the RE programme
- the clarity of the focus of the various RE topics, to ensure that all are as effective as the best
- the opportunities to be more flexible and creative with the pattern of curriculum provision for RE to facilitate more cross-curricular and literacy links.

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