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Mrs C Dawes  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Dawes

### **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 29 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 and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

#### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is good.

- Standards in RE at the end of both key stages are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. This represents good achievement by the pupils although there is some unevenness in the overall pattern of progress.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage develop a familiarity with the basic language of the subject. They are able to talk about different stories and religious practices with some confidence, recognising that people celebrate in different ways. Throughout Key Stage 1, pupils develop a framework of knowledge which enables them to understand the importance of religion in the lives of many people. They are beginning to

ask perceptive questions about religious belief and practice. They also recognise parallels between aspects of religion and their own lives.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have developed knowledge and understanding of a wide range of features of religion and belief. When given the opportunity, they can talk about and explore deeper aspects of the subject offering thoughtful responses and ideas. In one Year 6 lesson, for example, the pupils showed considerable insight and originality in their discussion of the idea of reincarnation.
- The pattern of the pupils' progress, while good overall, is variable. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress. On occasions, progress is less secure when the learning is less well focused or the more able are not challenged sufficiently.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons. RE makes a strong contribution to the development of pupils' personal and thinking skills including their speaking and listening and their ability to work collaboratively. While pupils do have opportunities to write in RE, the range and depth of literacy activities are relatively limited.
- RE also contributes strongly to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They value the subject and understand why it is important to understand the beliefs and cultures of others. Through the use of more reflective activities and structured discussion work, pupils have good opportunities to consider some of the more spiritual aspects of their personal experience.

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

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- RE lessons are well organised with a pattern of positive relationships and good behaviour. Teachers research the topics carefully and explain the purpose of the learning clearly.
- At its best, RE teaching is highly effective and focused on developing the skills of open investigation and enquiry. Good use is made of questioning and a wide range of different learning strategies is deployed to engage interest, including use of drama and information and communication technology (ICT). Some impressive use is made of the philosophy for children (P4C) approach to learning and there is scope to extend this further. Teachers generally strive to ensure that there is a balance of work across the two main areas of attainment: learning 'about and from' religion and belief.
- Occasionally, where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, activities are not as well matched to the range of abilities within the class and the learning can lack clear purpose and structure. In these cases, questioning is less effective in assessing progress and adjusting the learning to meet the pupils' needs.
- Assessment practice is underdeveloped. While work is usually marked with some comments on how well pupils have done, targets are sometimes too

vague to be meaningful. Some initial work has been done to develop a system for monitoring progress against the levels of attainment but, because these are not used in planning, the process has a limited effect.

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

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work is in the process of development alongside the wider drive to introduce a more imaginative and creative overall curriculum. While there are examples of good practice in the current RE provision, the quality is uneven. Some topics incorporate opportunities for sustained well-focused learning; for example, some of the planned work on the topics of Festivals and Celebrations and Living Things is of good quality. On other occasions, however, the choice of material is rather arbitrarily related to a wider theme and, as a result, the learning lacks clear purpose and structure; this is particularly the case with the use of some biblical material. The school's assumption that RE should be taught weekly limits flexibility and occasionally restricts the opportunity to be more creative and coherent in the planning of the subject.
- While progression in the RE curriculum is generally satisfactory, there is little differentiation in the planning to help teachers adjust the pitch of the learning and aid assessment. There is a clear balance of work across different religious traditions and RE incorporates some opportunities to discuss wider issues related to religion such as creation myths and life after death.
- RE benefits from links with the global dimension of the curriculum which is prominent in the school. RE is integrated with the school's fundraising programme and its focus on learning outside the classroom. While there are profitable links with local Christian communities, the school has yet to develop active contact with groups from non-Christian traditions.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE benefits from the strong whole-school commitment to widening pupils' horizons and developing personal values and talents. As a result, the subject has a secure place within the life of the school.
- The provision for the subject meets statutory requirements and is matched to the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The school recognises that it needs to develop the rationale for the inclusion of RE within its new creative curriculum.
- There is a pattern of monitoring and improvement planning in RE although at present this lacks a sharp focus on raising standards. The development of a whole-school approach to planning linked to the introduction of the creative curriculum has helped provide a context to plan together and share practice. The school has found it hard to access any significant local professional development opportunities in RE although training on P4C has supported improvements in the subject.

- Resources for RE are reasonable with some good use of ICT and the internet. However, in some rooms the limited provision of blackout limits the effectiveness of the whiteboard activities.

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

- reviewing the RE curriculum to secure greater consistency in the quality of RE by:
  - ensuring that the RE elements within integrated topics are focused effectively
  - building in a stronger enquiry-based approach to learning
  - using levels to help plan more differentiated outcomes for pupils, to aid assessment, and to raise the level of challenge for the more able
  - extending the opportunities for pupils to engage directly with a wider diversity of local religious communities.

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**