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Mr A Antell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Antell

### **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 September 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, a governor and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Attainment in RE by the end of Key Stage 2 is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The represents satisfactory progress by the pupils.
- There is no significant difference in the progress of different groups of pupils, except in the case of the more able where the level of challenge in some of the work does not extend them sufficiently.
- Pupils develop a reasonable body of knowledge and understanding of a range of religions. They appreciate the importance of religion and belief in people's lives. When given the opportunity, pupils can interpret different religious material; for example, when Year 6 offered ideas about the meaning of a range of Christian artefacts.

- Pupils are less adept at using the higher order skills of enquiry into religion and beliefs. Their ability to debate and discuss more controversial issues arising from their study of religion is not well-developed. While pupils explore aspects of their personal experience and values arising out of their study of religion, the level of their reflections is sometimes limited.
- The quality of the pupils' learning in RE is variable. They have some opportunities to develop group-work skills and to use a variety of creative forms of expression in RE. However, the range of writing used in RE is limited. Pupils have positive attitudes to RE. They enjoy the lessons and, when given the opportunity, have the confidence to ask pertinent questions and offer thoughtful insights.

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

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory with some good features.

- There is variability in the quality of the teaching. In all lessons, pupils and activities are managed well and behaviour is good.
- In the best lessons, teachers explain the learning carefully and use a range of effective strategies to engage pupils in their learning; for example, in one Year 3 lesson very effective use was made of whole-class singing to reinforce learning about a biblical parable. Teachers generally have sound subject knowledge and research the topics well. In these lessons, teachers use questioning well to prompt learning and check pupils' progress.
- In less effective lessons, pupils do not always fully understand their learning and their concentration can wane. Questioning is not always used effectively to check the pupils' progress and address any misconceptions.
- More generally, teaching does not develop sustained enquiry into religion and belief. As a result, pupils do not always have a clear overview of the direction of their learning or the key questions which underpin the topic being investigated. In most lessons, there is little differentiation of learning to ensure an appropriate level of challenge, especially for the more able.
- While there is some good use of questioning in lessons, the wider arrangements for assessing and recording pupils' progress are weak. Although data on pupils' performance are collected at the end of Year 6 the evidence to support the judgements is weak and unreliable.

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

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision for RE meets statutory requirements and broadly follows the locally agreed syllabus. The school has recognised that it has found it difficult to plan effectively on the basis of that syllabus and intends to review its provision once the new agreed syllabus for Sefton is published. At present, for example, limited use is made of the levels of attainment in

planning and assessment. The integration of the two areas of attainment, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion, is not always effective.

- The curriculum offers a good coverage of a range of religions. The pattern of topics is well-balanced. A pattern of medium-term planning is in place but its effectiveness is inhibited by the absence of clear, differentiated objectives for, and a lack of clarity about the key questions driving, each topic. As a result, the coherence of some of the planning is limited.
- RE is usually delivered once a week in half-termly units. Occasionally, there is some integration of RE within the wider thematic approach adopted in the school. However, the main pattern of delivery, coupled with the extended use of higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) to teach the subject, tends to distance the subject from the wider curriculum restricting, for example, links with literacy.
- RE makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are opportunities for reflection and for developing pupils' values and engagement with the local community. While the contribution to cultural development is positive, the opportunities for pupils to gain first-hand experience of the religious diversity in Britain are limited. There are good links with representatives of local churches although these are mainly focused on collective worship and school celebrations rather than the main RE curriculum.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- RE is coordinated by a committed and enthusiastic subject leader who is supported by the wider 'knowledge and understanding' curriculum team. Her expertise is developing rapidly, partly through involvement with the local SACRE and agreed syllabus review process.
- The day-to-day management of the subject is good. An appropriate policy for RE is in place and progress is being made in organising and auditing the subject resources.
- The arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and improving RE require further development. For example, over half of RE lessons are taught by HLTAs but this arrangement is not being monitored and little subject training has been provided for these staff. The monitoring of standards and the action planning are not focused sharply on raising standards.
- While the subject coordinator has benefited from working with the local SACRE, there has been very little subject training for other staff in recent years. There are plans to address this with the implementation of the new agreed syllabus.
- The subject makes a sound contribution to the wider life of the school through the opportunities it provides to link with charity and community activities.

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

- reviewing and improving the RE curriculum by, for each topic,:
  - clarifying the underlying key purpose and key questions
  - incorporating differentiated learning objectives
  - establishing a well-defined process of enquiry
  - building in clear assessment opportunities
- establishing a more robust and sharply focused process of monitoring, review and action planning and, in particular, monitoring carefully:
  - the impact of the use of HTLAs to deliver RE
  - the effectiveness of the pattern of curriculum delivery
- developing more opportunities for pupils to engage at first hand with the diversity of religions within Britain.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Alan Brine**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**