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Mr A Newman
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Dear Mr Newman

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 6 October 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 five lessons and a story session with a local church group.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- The pupils at this special school have a wide range of complex learning needs. Most pupils make good progress in relation to the development of the broader personal and social skills linked to RE. They also develop a basic familiarity with a range of stories and other features of religion. Some are able to make simple links between these features and their own experience. The most able are able to talk about simple questions arising from their work. Sometimes pupils struggle to make sense of the material they are encountering because of some limitations in the current curriculum.
- For those pupils with the most challenging needs, achievement in relation to RE is limited to a very broad development of the ability to engage and respond to the world. They develop their curiosity and basic

communication skills but specific RE achievement is difficult to define for this group.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- The best lessons are well-organised with very careful attention paid to the pupils' individual needs. Deployment of in-class support is very effective and ensures that all pupils are able to make progress. Good use is made of resources and teaching strategies which engage pupils and maintain their interest.
- Pupils have good opportunities to record their work. Photographs are often used to capture the learning and help the pupils recognise their achievements.
- Occasionally, when teachers are unsure about the RE focus of the learning, progress in relation to specific subject outcomes is more limited.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- A comprehensive scheme of work is in place with detailed planning guidance notes. The school has sought to follow the locally agreed syllabus very closely. However, it has not always found it easy to adapt the syllabus to meet the specific and significant learning needs of the pupils. Cross-curricular links are not always sharply defined and can unbalance the focus of the learning.
- Sometimes, for example, biblical material is incorporated in the planning with no appropriate context for the pupils to understand the stories. On other occasions, significant elements of topics, such as harvest, bear little relation to RE focusing, for example, on geographical or scientific understanding.
- A strength of the curriculum is the wide pattern of enrichment for the pupils' learning in RE. This includes activities within the school related to developing a sense of curiosity, using experiential learning, linking to charity activities and developing a familiarity with diversity. The school has also built up a number of links with local religious groups who provide opportunities for visits or who visit the school to tell stories and talk about aspects of their faith.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good with some outstanding features.

- The subject benefits from the strong leadership of a committed and hardworking coordinator who is well supported by the senior team. The leader provides good support for the staff in terms of planning materials and resources.

- Arrangements for monitoring, reviewing and improving the subject are extensive and clear. However, the internal monitoring of the provision found it difficult to identify easily the shortcomings in the curriculum.
- There is a clear set of policies related to RE. The subject makes a strong contribution to the wider priorities of the school in relation to, for example, community cohesion and pupils' personal development.
- A start has been made in developing assessment arrangements, but these require integration within a curriculum which better matches the pupils' needs.
- Opportunities are found to provide some professional development through staff meetings. While the subject leader has attended a local support group the school has found it hard to access training on RE within the special school context.

The area for improvement, which we discussed, is:

- reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it is based on a set of clearly defined subject objectives which are more closely related to the pupils' needs, capitalising on the scope to interpret the locally agreed syllabus flexibly.

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