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Dear Miss Smith

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 30 April 2012 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, the local vicar and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with good features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and reach standards which are above expectations. They develop a good knowledge of a range of features of religion and can talk about their learning with confidence. For example, in one Year 2 class they were able to identify a range of pertinent questions to ask about Islam and showed good insight into the importance which religion plays in people's lives.
- Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 3 and 4, although the range of their progress is narrower. They extend their knowledge of key features of religion but their skills of understanding and investigation are less well developed. In Years 5 and 6, achievement is satisfactory and by the end of Key Stage 2, standards are broadly in line with expectations.

- Pupils' progress is better in relation to the area of attainment 'learning about' religion. They have less scope to extend their ability to 'learn from' religion. For example, few opportunities are provided to discuss and debate issues which arise from their investigations.
- While learning in RE is also satisfactory overall, some good examples are evident of pupils using more challenging skills of enquiry to investigate religion. In the best practice, pupils are invited to take responsibility for organising their questioning and investigations and presenting and reflecting on their learning. These higher-order skills are less evident in Key Stage 2, where the older and more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently.
- Attitudes to RE are generally positive. Pupils appreciate the importance of RE and enjoy opportunities to explore different religions and cultures, particularly through the very engaging enrichment programme the school offers.

Quality of teaching in RE

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

- Lessons are carefully planned and well managed. Teaching ensures that behaviour is good and pupils work effectively in pairs or groups.
- In the best lessons, learning is carefully structured to enable pupils to make good progress building their understanding carefully through well-organised activities. Teachers demonstrate good subject expertise. Questioning is used well to promote learning and check pupils' progress. Activities are carefully adjusted to match pupils' needs. Sensitive use is made of pupils' religious backgrounds, which they are encouraged to share to help promote understanding. Pupils also have good opportunities to take responsibility for developing different ways of presenting their learning, including some good use of information and communication technology.
- Where teaching is satisfactory, the level of challenge is more restricted and questioning is not used as effectively to promote learning. Sometimes a heavy emphasis is placed on gathering information, with a limited sense of the questions or ideas the pupils are engaged in investigating. On occasions, the teaching is not clear enough about the wider purpose of the learning in terms of developing insights into the world of religion and belief.
- Assessment is under-developed. While teachers mark pupils' work regularly, often with encouraging comments, no use is currently made of attainment targets or levels in assessment. The arrangements for recording pupils' progress are also underdeveloped.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory with good features.

- While the more formal RE curriculum is satisfactory, the wider pattern of enrichment activities related to RE is good. A series of whole-school 'off-timetable' days have been introduced, which provide an excellent opportunity for pupils to experience the wider cultural life which 'brings religion to life'. The most recent day on the theme of Indian culture was highly successful and pupils produced some outstanding artwork as a result. In addition, the school has created links with a range of local religious communities, providing scope for pupils to visit their places of worship. This pattern of enrichment is providing pupils with many memorable and meaningful experiences which they talk about with great enthusiasm.
- The more formal curriculum is closely based on recommended content in the 2009 Bolton agreed syllabus but limited use is made of the attainment targets or levels when planning work. A structure is in place to secure coverage of the syllabus content but the school has found it difficult to find a structure that ensures effective progression in learning, particularly for older pupils in Key Stage 2. As a result, many of the units of work are not sufficiently challenging. Planning sometimes places too heavy an emphasis on gathering information at the expense of extending pupils' insights into the nature and significance of religion or promoting opportunities for pupils to 'learn from' religion.
- Currently RE is primarily taught on a 'once a week' basis in term or half-term units. On occasions this tends to fragment pupils' learning and limits the scope to incorporate RE within the wider 'integrated' curriculum.
- The provision for the teaching of Christianity, while in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus, is not sufficiently coherent and progressive. As a result, pupils do not develop a clear enough understanding of the key beliefs of the faith.
- Overall, RE makes a positive contribution to the development of learning skills and the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some good opportunities to develop literacy are in place although potentially, a wider range of written genre in RE could be used, for example, persuasive writing, particularly with older pupils.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE is led by an experienced teacher who brings a good background of subject expertise and enthusiasm to the role. The subject is well resourced.
- A clear and well-designed process is in place for monitoring and evaluating the provision, although at present limited use is made of information about pupils' levels of attainment when reviewing their work. The school has identified the need to extend the level of challenge for older pupils. A

straightforward action plan is in place to address the areas for development. As a result, the capacity for improvement is good.

- Effective use has been made of visits for staff to local places of worship to provide them with better insight into different religions. However, progress in implementing the 2009 agreed syllabus was initially slow because of difficulty in accessing local authority guidance and support. As a result, the school has found it hard to develop an effective model for planning on the basis of the syllabus. The use of national guidance and websites could potentially be extended to support professional development in the subject.
- RE has provided good opportunities to develop links with the local community and contribute to the promotion of community cohesion. The wider whole-school focus on promoting stronger links with parents is reflected and reinforced by RE, for example, through the use made of parents' expertise in supporting learning in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing and improving the medium term planning by:
 - moving the focus of learning from delivery of content to the development of understanding and the promotion of open enquiry.
 - ensuring that a clear sense of progression is built into the pupils' learning across the school
 - extending the level of challenge for older pupils
 - building in greater differentiation and clearer assessment opportunities

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