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Mr Christopher Fielding  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Fielding

Ofsted survey inspection programme – religious education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27 June 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE the visit had a particular focus on the subject's contribution to the promotion of community cohesion.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with yourself and two representatives from the local churches, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

The overall achievement of the pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- While the standards reached by the pupils at the end of each key stage are below the expectations of the agreed syllabus, there is considerable variation in these standards. There is some good

achievement but overall the pattern of the progress pupils make is too uneven.

- Some more able pupils make good progress reaching standards which are in line with expectations in relation to some aspects of the subject. For example, some pupils in Year 2 have a good understanding of the meaning and importance of some key stories from the Christian tradition. Similarly some pupils in Year 6 link key aspects of their learning together using a wide range of religious vocabulary to explain their understanding of Buddhism. Pupils in Year 5 make good progress in understanding some key features of the festival of Divali and how these reflect aspects of Hindu belief.
- Elsewhere achievement is satisfactory and, occasionally, inadequate. The progress pupils make in developing a coherent and progressive understanding of the Christian tradition is impeded by weaknesses in the structure of that aspect of the RE curriculum. Less able pupils observed in Year 2 made inadequate progress in the development of their understanding of the Jewish festival of Hanukah because the structure of the learning was inappropriate.
- The progress of less able pupils is often good because they are well-supported in class but higher ability pupils sometimes underachieve because the tasks they are set are not challenging enough. Again, however, this pattern is not straightforward. Some less able pupils' progress is limited because they cannot access the literacy level of materials they are asked to consider. Some more able are stretched by some aspects of their work and achieve well.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is good. They have a positive attitude towards their learning in RE. Older pupils, in particular, are very clear about the value of the subject expressing the view that it helps them develop a respect for others and a better understanding of the different ways people live their lives. The focus on 'learning from' religion is sometimes not challenging enough and, as a result, the potential of the subject to help pupils explore their own ideas about religious issues is not exploited sufficiently.

## Quality of teaching and learning

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

- As with the pattern of achievement in RE, the quality of teaching is uneven. In the best lessons where teaching is sometimes very good, teachers prepare well, have good subject knowledge and use engaging activities and resources to promote effective learning. In these cases, lessons are well structured and some outstanding use is made of discussion and questioning to consolidate and extend pupils' thinking.
- Generally however, and including the best lessons, insufficient use is made of levels in setting the learning objectives, and tasks are not differentiated appropriately in terms of RE-related outcomes. There is

also scope to extend the links with other areas of the curriculum particularly in pursuing higher challenge for the more able.

- In both lessons observed some good use was made of white board technology linked to paired work to engage pupils' interest and stimulate their thinking.
- Where teaching is satisfactory or, on occasions, inadequate, the pitch of the work is sometimes not very well matched to the ability of the pupils; questioning and discussion are not structured effectively; and, concepts are not introduced in a sequential way.
- There is also considerable variation in the quality of the written tasks which the pupils undertake. In some groups and in some parts of the RE curriculum there is too much use of lower level worksheet tasks; elsewhere, some good use is made of more extended independent writing.
- RE work is often marked regularly and pupils often receive quite detailed feedback on their progress. Too often, however, comments are focused on generic literacy skills rather than subject specific aspects of progress. This reflects the limited use made of levels to plan and assess pupils' learning.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is broadly satisfactory but requires some improvement.

- Although the current time allocation for the subject is very inadequate, there are plans to address this for next September. The current curriculum is matched to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus and secures some coverage of all six identified religions. However, pupils do not have enough opportunity to consolidate and integrate their learning on one tradition before moving to the next. This is partly because the limited time allocation means some coverage is too superficial. Insufficient attention is paid to making the links between topics explicit in the planning.
- The overall continuity and progression within the curriculum is not entirely secure. Some topics are covered well. For example, pupils gain a good grounding in key aspects of Buddhism in Year 6. A key weakness, however, is the coverage of Christianity where a more creative approach is required to the content in the agreed syllabus to secure a coherent and progressive approach to the teaching of the faith.
- Some good use is made of literacy in RE and links are forged with some areas of creative arts. There is, however, scope to be more adventurous and to develop more extended links to other subjects such as history. There are very positive links with two local churches to enrich pupils' learning.

## Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory and the capacity to improve is good.

- The current interim arrangements for the co-ordination of the subject are working well. A new subject co-ordinator will be appointed from September 2007. The legacy of effective subject leadership in the past means RE has a solid position within the school and both pupils and teachers take it seriously.
- The arrangements for monitoring RE are currently under-developed as a result of the period of interim subject leadership. However, a recent thorough self-evaluation of the subject has been undertaken and the judgements are broadly accurate and perceptive. Although an action plan for the subject is not in place, there is a clear understanding about the priorities for improvement.
- While the current provision is closely matched to the agreed syllabus, a priority for the new co-ordinator will be to explore ways in which the syllabus can be used flexibly and creatively to produce a more coherent overall curriculum.

## The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive and improving contribution to the school's wider promotion of community cohesion. Pupils are very engaged by RE and value the contribution it makes to developing their appreciation of cultural diversity and the role which religion plays in the local community. The links with the local churches are used positively to encourage the pupils and their parents to engage in some key aspects of local community life. The developing links with a Rochdale school with a high percentage of pupils from the Muslim tradition has great potential to extend the appreciation and understanding which both pupils and parents have of religious diversity.

## Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are satisfactory overall. Good use of in-class support ensures pupils are usually engaged in their learning. In some cases the planning of tasks does not take enough account of literacy levels and this impedes the progress of some less able pupils. While sometimes more able pupils make good progress this is not consistent and attention needs to be given to developing more demanding tasks to ensure they are challenged appropriately in all lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the extension to the RE curriculum from September 2007 is matched by a thorough review of its overall coherence and progression, particularly in relation to work on the Christian tradition

- developing the use of levels in planning and assessing RE to secure greater consistency in the teaching and progress of pupils
- extending the challenge for the more able pupils
- exploring creative links between work in RE and other areas of the curriculum.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine  
Her Majesty's Inspector