

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



06 July 2007

Mr Philip Hall
Headteacher
Grange Valley Primary School
Heyes Ave
Haydock
St Helens
WA11 0XQ

Dear Mr Hall

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 July 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 your self and the RE subject co-ordinator, 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

Standards in RE are broadly average and the overall achievement of the pupils is satisfactory.

- The standards reached by the pupils at the end of each key stage are broadly in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus. There is, however, some unevenness in the pattern of these standards. There is some good achievement but, overall, the pattern of the progress of the pupils is satisfactory.

- Pupils in the Foundation Stage achieve well and quickly acquire a familiarity with some features of religion. Pupils in Year 1 reach standards which are above average for their age. They develop a good framework of basic concepts and questions within which to locate their learning about religion. Their understanding of the connection between features of the local church and key aspects of Christian faith is impressive. Pupils in Year 2 are less confident in handling religious material and the overall pattern of achievement across Key Stage 1 is satisfactory.
- Achievement across Key Stage 2 is also satisfactory although, once again, the pattern is uneven. Generally pupils acquire a good knowledge of key features of a range of religions and have a keen awareness of the significance of religious diversity. For example, the knowledge of pupils about aspects of Christian and Muslim community life is good. However, less developed is their insight into the meaning and significance of religion in people's lives. Overall, pupils have too little opportunity to explore their own thoughts, ideas and experiences in relation to religious and human questions of meaning because this aspect of RE is not secure in teachers' planning.
- The progress of less able pupils is often good because they are well-supported in class but higher ability pupils sometimes underachieve when tasks do not challenge them to investigate the deeper meaning and significance of religion.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is good. They enjoy learning about different religions and older pupils, in particular, are very clear that RE helps them develop a respect for others and a better understanding of different cultures. Because the focus on 'learning from' religion is sometimes underplayed, the potential of the subject to help promote pupils' spiritual development is not always exploited sufficiently.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- As with the pattern of achievement in RE, the quality of teaching is uneven. At its best, teaching is lively and communicates an interest and excitement about exploring religion. Teachers work hard to ensure their basic subject knowledge is secure. Effective use is made of a range of resources and teaching and learning strategies. Some good links are made to support the development of pupils' literacy and ICT skills. Some good use is made of opportunities for independent and collaborative learning. Teaching assistant support in classes helps ensure all pupils are well-supported in RE lessons.
- Elsewhere, where teaching and learning are satisfactory: the structure of lessons is not clear enough and, for example, learning is not consolidated sufficiently before moving on; questioning is too narrowly focused on factual recall; and, literacy links are not exploited sufficiently. Generally, not enough use is made of levels to ensure planning is pitched to the different ability groups within classes. There is scope to extend the links with other areas of the curriculum particularly in pursuing higher challenge for the more able.

- Work is often marked regularly but overall assessment in RE is under-developed.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The QCA units of work are used to provide a sound structure for the RE curriculum. This is helping to ensure schemes of work incorporate a reasonable degree of breadth, balance and progression. Care is being taken to secure coverage to take account of some mixed age classes. Some very effective medium term planning is in place based on, but adapting, the QCA units.
- The move towards blocking time to teach RE is positive. It is enabling the school to explore more in-depth work with RE linking to other curriculum areas and helping to support the development of basic skills.
- Overall, however, the quality of curriculum planning is very uneven. In some cases insufficient attention is paid to adapting the QCA units to match the needs of the pupils. In these cases, the underlying key concepts and questions of each unit are not secured in the teaching. Insufficient use is made of levels to ensure learning is appropriately pitched to the range of the pupils' abilities and secure a proper balance in learning across the two attainment targets.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The subject is led and managed by an experienced co-ordinator who has a clear understanding of the subject. In the absence of any effective subject guidance from the local authority, she has taken a very sensible strategic decision to base the curriculum on national guidance materials. She provides good support for class teachers and the resources broadly match the schemes of work.
- The arrangements for monitoring RE are currently very under-developed. A recent review of the subject has been undertaken but this is not as yet sufficiently evaluative. This is partly because the school has no assessment data for RE on which to judge the effectiveness of its provision. Monitoring is not currently informed by a clear set of evaluative questions and criteria. An improvement plan for the subject is in place which highlights the need to develop the monitoring arrangements.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils understand and value the contribution RE makes to developing their respect for the beliefs and lifestyles of others and their appreciation of the role religion plays in peoples' lives. The links with the local churches are used very well to encourage the pupils to recognise the importance of religion in the local community. Very recently links have been established with a local

college with a high proportion of Muslim students. Pupils at the school are sending reports of their learning about Islam to the students for their feedback. Hopefully this link will extend the currently limited contact with non-Christian religious communities in the area. There is also scope to extend the opportunities for older pupils to explore the way religion in the modern world is represented in the media.

Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are satisfactory. Good use is made of in-class support to make sure pupils with learning difficulties are engaged in their learning. Sometimes more able pupils make good progress but this is not consistent. More use should be made of tasks which ensure they are challenged appropriately in all lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- incorporating an emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of the meaning and significance of religion in peoples' lives
- providing more opportunities for pupils to explore their own response to the religious and spiritual dimension of life
- establishing shared and manageable expectations about effective medium term planning in the subject across the school
- developing the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the subject by incorporating a stronger focus on pupil achievement and the quality of provision.

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