

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Helen Pegman  
Headteacher  
Park Road Community Primary School  
Wroxham Road  
Great Sankey  
Warrington  
Cheshire  
WA5 3EF

Dear Mrs Pegman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 September 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 subject leader for RE, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

The overall achievement of the pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- The standards reached by the pupils in RE at the end of year 2 are slightly above the expectations of the agreed syllabus and this represents good progress across Key Stage 1. At the end of year 6 standards are broadly in line with expectations representing satisfactory progress across Key Stage 2.

- By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils have a good framework of understanding about religion. They recognise that religion is diverse and deals with some important issues of life. Pupils can, for example, explain how different people think differently about God and that no-one can be sure what God is like. They also appreciate different creation stories and recognise the link with the idea that the world is special. Their overall knowledge of religious material is good.
- By the end of Key Stage 2 the pupils have developed their knowledge of key features of a variety of religions. They recognise similarities and differences between different traditions and can use a range of religious concepts appropriately. However, their ability to investigate and respond to religious material independently could be extended further.
- Throughout the school less able pupils achieve well as a result of good support and encouragement. In some classes, particularly towards the upper end of Key Stage 2, the more able could be extended further through the provision of more challenging tasks.
- The contribution made by RE to pupils' personal development is good. Care is taken, particularly with the younger children, to ensure they have opportunities to reflect on their own experience in the light of their learning about religion. They generally have a positive attitude towards the subject and have a strong sense that diversity is to be valued and respected. A clear link is made in many lessons between RE and wider aspects of personal and social development.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory overall and some key features of lessons are good.

- A number of important aspects of the teaching and learning in RE are good. Great effort is made to include a wide variety of strategies to stimulate interest and maintain enjoyment in the subject. Good use is made of creative activities such as drama, mime and art to ensure learning is fun. Teaching support assistants are well-deployed to support learning in the subject. Some effective use is also made of speaking and listening to promote understanding and develop respect for the views of others. In addition, some positive use is made of some higher order skills, such as mind-mapping, to extend pupils' ability to organise their thinking about religion.
- However, a number of key aspects of planning are under-developed and limit the impact of these more positive features of teaching. On occasions over emphasis is placed on pupils gathering information as opposed to developing skills of enquiry and investigation. Some of the less effective aspects of teaching relate to wider features of curriculum planning in RE highlighted below.
- The RE subject leader has provided good advice to teachers about manageable strategies to assess pupils' progress in RE. Levels are being used to record this progress. Parents receive regular reports on their child's progress in the subject. For example, teachers frequently make careful notes to record the responses of pupils in RE and to track

individual progress. However, uncertainties about using levels to plan clear learning objectives limits the impact and reliability of these assessment arrangements.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Significant efforts have been made by the subject leader to ensure the RE curriculum is matched to the requirements of the recently published locally agreed syllabus. The subject receives an appropriate amount of curriculum time and there is a good coverage of the required religions. There is a good balance of work between the two attainment targets and a clear focus on providing opportunities to link RE to other areas of the curriculum particularly at Key Stage 1. There is scope to extend the links with literacy in pursuing higher challenge for the more able at Key Stage 2.
- A clear overarching long-term curriculum map for RE is in place and teachers are now developing more detailed planning. However, the pattern of some areas of work lacks coherence and structure and is not effective as a basis for more detailed lesson planning. The negative impact of this on achievement is particularly evident at Key Stage 2. The school has no plan for the provision of professional development to support the introduction of the new locally agreed syllabus.

## Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- RE is managed by a highly committed subject leader who receives good support from the senior leadership team. As a result the subject is treated seriously and is well-established in the school. For example, the governors receive routine reports on RE and a clear monitoring and development strategy for the subject is in place.
- The current monitoring and development plans focus largely on issues related to the management of the subject and there is a need to balance this with objectives related more directly to improving pupils' achievement and the quality of provision.
- Recently the school has carried out a self-evaluation of the subject. However, in the absence of a programme of professional development in the subject, it has been difficult for the subject leader to evaluate the effectiveness of the subject against clear models of good practice.
- While the current provision is closely matched to the agreed syllabus, a priority for the school 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 contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils enjoy finding out about religion and value the contribution RE makes to developing their understanding of cultural diversity. The links with the local

churches are used positively and a number of visits are undertaken to places of worship of other faiths represented in the area. A good start has been made to exploring links between RE and citizenship through a focus on themes related to community.

## Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are good overall. Effective use of in-class support ensures less able pupils are able to become actively involved in their learning. Sometimes more able pupils make good progress but 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:

- undertaking a careful evaluation of the newly implemented scheme of work, to ensure the structure of pupils' learning is consistently effective and progressive
- exploring ways in which the requirements of the agreed syllabus can be used flexibly and creatively
- making greater use of levels in planning and, in particular, extending the challenge for the more able pupils at Key Stage 2
- reviewing the current arrangements for self-evaluation and development planning in the subject to ensure there is more focus on raising achievement and improving 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