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Mrs N Jamie
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jamie

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Usha Devi HMI on 8 October 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 governors, staff and pupils, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Pupil achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards across the school are below those outlined in the Shropshire agreed syllabus. The attainment of the pupils on entry is below average but they make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Pupils are generally more successful in 'learning from' religion than 'learning about' religion. This sometimes results in pupils offering limited responses when answering questions about the impact of religion on the lives of individuals and communities because they do not have the depth of factual knowledge to draw upon.

- Pupils in the Foundation Stage are beginning to respond to themes within stories. In Key Stage 1 pupils learn about religion by, for example, engaging with religious artefacts. They show appropriate respect and appreciate that certain items are very special and have to be handled carefully. Pupils are less adept in recalling the purpose and use of each artefact.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 are beginning to connect learning in RE with a variety of forms of expression, such as music, art and drama. Pupils are able to take turns and listen respectfully when, for example, talking about the importance of prayer in Islam.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to the subject. They find RE interesting, however most pupils reported that they find the work too easy. This view is confirmed in the work seen in books. Pupils, especially the most able, are not being given challenging enough tasks to complete.
- The contribution of RE in supporting pupils' personal development is satisfactory.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Relationships in all classes are good and pupils behave well. Interactive whiteboards are used well to extend the range of resources available to stimulate pupils' interest and enhance their learning.
- Sometimes pupils do not understand the purpose of lessons and are not sufficiently supported to help them achieve as much as they are able.
- Assessment opportunities are developing. The recently introduced arrangements are a positive step in enabling teachers to understand the level at which the pupils are working. However this information is not currently used to refine planning in the light of on-going assessment.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets the requirements of the agreed syllabus in broad terms. Long and medium term plans clearly identify both attainment targets. However evidence gathered from short term planning and in pupils' books, shows that there is some imbalance of work between the two attainment targets in the agreed syllabus. Limited attention is being paid to the systematic development of pupils' knowledge and understanding of religions. This is largely due to teachers' lack of confidence in delivering this aspect of the subject and therefore they focus more on learning 'from religion'.
- There is a satisfactory range of activities to enrich the curriculum, through theme days and the celebration of festivals. However insufficient use is made of fieldwork to enable pupils to gain first hand experience of the religions studied.
- Pupils are encouraged to express their responses, thoughts and feelings through art, dance and drama, especially in Key Stage 2.

There is scope to develop more opportunities to build independent writing into RE as work is mainly worksheet based.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The RE co-ordinator is keen and has good subject knowledge. A clear policy and a new scheme of work are in place. There are links with the governing body through a named governor with responsibility for RE.
- Monitoring arrangements are presently informal but the school has a largely accurate view of the provision for the subject. The co-ordinator has plans to work alongside colleagues to increase their subject knowledge and to improve the performance of pupils working below the expected level. The school is beginning to make use of data to raise attainment in RE.

Community Cohesion

RE makes a helpful contribution to the promotion of community cohesion; the teaching encourages respect for diversity and the development of pupils' confidence to ask questions about religion. The local authority has supported the school in undertaking a rigorous evaluation of its ability to promote community cohesion resulting in a realistic action plan to overcome the identified barriers. As a result a number of continuing professional development opportunities have been arranged to support staff in increasing their knowledge of how RE can make an even greater contribution to community cohesion.

Inclusion

Displays celebrate the work of all children and reflect positive images of diversity. Nevertheless, in RE work for pupils is not consistently matched to pupils' needs and this limits their achievement. Pupils requiring additional support are helped to make satisfactory progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing continuing professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' subject knowledge
- ensuring that there is a balance between the two attainment targets outlined in the agreed syllabus by teaching 'about religion' more systematically
- making more use of assessment information in order to better match work to pupils' needs.

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

Jacqueline K Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector