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Miss Kay Williamson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Williamson

### Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 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 your self, the link governor and the subject leader for RE, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards

The achievement of the pupils in RE is good.

- The standards in RE reached by the pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are just below the expectations of the agreed syllabus but this represents satisfactory progress across the key stage. By the end of Year 6 standards in some areas of work are above expectations and this represents good progress at Key Stage 2.
- By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils are beginning to grasp the idea of RE being about making sense of people's ways of life. They demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of some of the basic features of Judaism and are beginning to link aspects of the religion together in their thinking. They also know about many of the stories and festivals

of Christianity although their ability to link these together is slightly less secure.

- Across Key Stage 2, achievement is good although there is some unevenness in the progress they make. The grasp which Year 6 pupils show of some of the major beliefs and practices of Islam is particularly good. They have a very clear understanding of the importance of the religion in the lives of Muslims. They also appreciate the relationship between the faith and contemporary news stories. As a result of a successful visit from a representative of the Muslim faith, they are able to explain how Islam is practiced in different ways in different places and they can challenge media stereotypes of the religion.
- Their ability to discuss and consider a range of puzzling ultimate questions about life is also good. It would benefit from more opportunity to use more technical language in talking about the different forms of religious expression used in religion such as symbol, metaphor and myth.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, the pupils' knowledge of Christianity is quite extensive. However, their ability to link features of the religion together within a more coherent structure of understanding is not secure. As a result their understanding of Christianity tends to rather fragmented.
- Across both key stages, the strength of RE is the contribution it makes to developing the pupils' oracy skills. There is scope to extend this, and challenge the most able more effectively, by incorporating stronger links to literacy, particularly at Key Stage 2.
- The contribution made by RE to pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils are positive about RE. As one pupil in Year 6 said: 'RE makes you wonder and ask questions'. They are very clear that the subject is useful because it provides them with the chance to find out about different people's beliefs and ways of life.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Many of the features of teaching and learning in RE are good. Teachers take the subject seriously and plan carefully for its delivery. Some good use is made of questioning and discussion to stimulate pupils' thinking.
- Some challenging tasks are set asking pupils, for example, to organise and prioritise ideas for themselves. Care is taken to ensure the less able are well-supported in their learning.
- On occasions the structure of the learning, particularly in dealing with Christianity, is slightly uncertain. On these occasions the link between the material being explored and the wider structure of pupils' learning about the religion can be unclear. There is also scope to use more creative, imaginative strategies to enable pupils to engage more actively with religious material.
- While teachers keep notes to record responses to the lessons, assessment practice is under-developed and a priority in the RE improvement plan. Increasingly, use is being made of the guidance in the agreed syllabus about levels to help teachers plan more precisely.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school is currently at a point of transition in relation to planning the RE curriculum. The recently published revised agreed syllabus is supported by a scheme of work which is being disseminated on a rolling programme by the local authority. The RE subject coordinator is starting to introduce the scheme. At the same time the school is moving towards a more cross-curricular integrated planning model and it needs to ensure it is clear about the level of planning flexibility which exists within the published local authority guidance.
- The school recognises the curriculum needs to be developed further. In particular, the pattern of continuity and progression in work on Christianity needs to be reviewed. There is also scope to extend the use made of levels in planning and the links between RE and other aspects of the curriculum, notably literacy.
- The provision of enrichment activities to support learning in RE is good. Particularly positive use is made of links with the local church, and the, albeit quite limited, scope to use visitors from other traditions is exploited effectively.

## Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- RE is managed by a recently appointed, enthusiastic and thoughtful subject leader who receives good support from colleagues. She has undertaken an initial audit of the schools' provision; she has worked with colleagues in the process of reviewing the subject; and, she has produced a useful subject self-evaluation. The subject benefits from the strong support of the local vicar who is also the link governor for RE.
- The arrangements for monitoring the subject are improving although there is scope to focus more tightly on agreed priorities. RE has been identified as a school improvement priority for 2008/9 providing a good opportunity for a structured implementation of the revised agreed syllabus.
- The opportunities for professional development in the subject have been limited. The school is unaware of any local authority training linked to the implementation of the agreed syllabus although it has been receiving the appropriate support documentation.

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

RE makes a very positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils develop a good understanding of diversity of faith within Britain and the wider world. The ability of some of the older pupils to link their work in RE to contemporary issues in the media is particularly impressive. The links with the local clergy and church are used very well positively and are complemented by occasional visitors representing other

faith traditions. There is scope to explore the use of visits to non-Christian places of worship within the region.

## Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are good. In-class support is used well to support the less able pupils and ensure they are actively involved in their learning. There is scope to extend the level of challenge for some of the more able.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- clarifying the level of flexibility within the agreed syllabus in relation to curriculum planning and extending the use being made of the levels both in planning and assessing RE
- incorporating greater continuity and progression in work on Christianity to ensure pupils develop a more coherent understanding of the religion
- extend the level of challenge for the more able
- exploring stronger links between RE and literacy in order to both raise the level of challenge and help pupils make more sense of the language of religion.

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