

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



06 November 2007

Mrs C Royle
Headteacher
Heyes Lane Junior School
Crofton Ave
Timperley
Altrincham
WA15 6BZ

Dear Mrs Royle

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05 November 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 school inclusion co-ordinator 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 good.

Achievement and standards

The standards pupils attain in RE are above average and their achievement in the subject is good.

- The standards in RE reached by the pupils are above the expectations of the agreed syllabus in respect of many aspects of RE. Pupils arrive in the school in Year 3 with a good background of knowledge about religion. They achieve well and steadily develop a pattern of understanding and terminology within which to place their study of religion. By the end of Year 6 they have good knowledge and understanding of key features of the major world religions and have developed an enquiring mind when exploring religious issues. They

also appreciate the significance and importance of religion in many people's lives. They can, for example, explain the significance which some key features of religious practice have for the adherents of a faith.

- Where they pupils are slightly less secure is in relation to their ability to use the higher order skills of investigation, enquiry and interpretation in relation to religious material. There is also scope to extend further the opportunities for pupils to explore their own ideas about religious beliefs and, in the case of older pupils, link their learning to issues about religion in the modern world.
- The pupils' personal development in the context of RE is outstanding. They are very positive about the subject and show a lively interest in exploring the diversity of religious ways of life. They appreciate the importance of respecting the views of others while recognising that religion is not always a force for good in the world. The subject is carefully linked to the schools' wider programme of support for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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 very good. Lessons are planned meticulously. Learning often proceeds at a good pace and some very effective use is made of exposition and questioning to stimulate and engage pupils' interest. A very positive ethos of learning is established in lessons and relationships with pupils are positive. The teachers research the topics well and often present information very accurately and carefully.
- While many aspects of the teachers' management of learning in RE are very good, the way activities are structured does not always ensure that pupils' build effective links between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. At times insufficient attention is paid to the planned development of higher order learning skills in the context of studying religion.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The school is currently at a point of transition in relation to planning the RE curriculum. Care is being taken to match the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus while exploring its flexibility. An overarching curriculum map is in place which blends a thematic approach to the subject with more systematic work on Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Care has been taken to try to balance work on the two areas of attainment. Time for RE is tight and it will be important to monitor the effectiveness of the planning to ensure the most effective use is being made of the available time and of the links across the curriculum.
- The RE subject coordinator is in the process of developing individual units of work. Some good progress being made in identifying some key questions to help raise the level of challenge in the learning. The

individual units would benefit from the inclusion of an overarching sheet setting out, for example, the main focus, key questions and levelled outcomes for each topic. This would also help in setting out the links with prior and subsequent learning and cross-curricular links. There is also scope to explore stronger links with literacy as part of a drive to increase the level of challenge some areas of the pupils' learning in RE. The use of levels in both planning and assessment is an area for further development.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are good and the capacity for further improvement is also good.

- RE is managed by a recently appointed, highly committed and enthusiastic subject leader who receives very good support from the senior leadership team. A good pattern of induction has been established for the new subject leader which has, for example, included a visit to another local school with a reputation for effective RE. A careful and manageable action plan has been drawn up to focus the current review of the subject.
- Very sensible and effective use is being made of local authority support to help develop the curriculum and provide staff training. Good progress has been made in developing resources for the subject. The subject leader has established a successful pattern of joint working with her colleagues to ensure the process of developing the newly devised curriculum planning is productive and effective.
- A useful subject evaluation was produced to support preparation for the inspection. A plan for evaluating the impact of the new curriculum is in place although, to date, the monitoring of the effectiveness of RE and the achievement of the pupils has been underdeveloped.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a very positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils develop positive attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity and they show respect for differences of belief and lifestyle. Some good links have been forged with churches in the local community and effective use is made of a contact within the Jewish faith. The opportunities for visits to non-Christian places of worship have had to be curtailed due to cost. There is scope to extend the opportunities for pupils to explore the links between their studies and current issues related to religion in the media.

Inclusion

Close working between the school's inclusion co-ordinator and the subject leader has helped ensure the arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are good. Carefully structured tasks and in-class support are used well to ensure less able pupils are actively involved in their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending the level of challenge of work in RE especially in relation to 'learning about religion'
- exploring stronger links between RE and literacy in order to support a rise in the level of challenge in RE
- ensuring that work 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion is structured and integrated more effectively to promote greater progress in relation to both areas of attainment
- developing the use made of levels in both planning and assessment.

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