

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



10 December 2007

Miss Allison Hickson
Headteacher
Brockholes Primary School
Brant Road
Preston
PR1 5TU

Dear Miss Hickson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7 December 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, your link adviser and the acting 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 with outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is good.

- The standards in RE reached by the pupils are broadly in line, and in some cases, slightly above, the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Given the starting point of the pupils when they arrive in the school, this represents good progress overall. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils have developed a wide vocabulary about religion and can link aspects of religions together well. They recognise the importance of religion in people's lives. They can also talk about the feelings and experiences within religious stories.

- By the end of Key Stage 2 the pupils have extended their range of knowledge and understanding of religion significantly. They can clearly identify the key questions to ask when enquiring into religion and they use research skills effectively to investigate beliefs and practices. A notable strength is their ability to engage in discussion about the religious meaning behind some key story material. Pupils in Year 5, for example, demonstrated an impressive ability to explore the links between the Noah and nativity stories and how these links relate to the Christian concept of covenant.
- The personal development of the pupils in the context of RE is impressive. They show a lively interest in the subject and enjoy enquiring into different people's beliefs and ways of life. They are aware of the importance of the subject in terms of the way it helps promote respect and understanding and reduce prejudice and racism. The school is seeking to create strong links between RE and its wider programme of work on social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL). As a result, for example, pupils are developing a sense of the value of quietness and reflection in their own lives.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good and, on occasions, outstanding.

- RE lessons are planned carefully with close attention to the detailed support materials provided in the local authority exemplar scheme of work. Teachers have high expectations and use a wide range of strategies to secure the attention and interest of pupils. During the inspection, effective use was made of story-telling, artistic imagery, drama and creative activity to promote learning. In one lesson, some outstanding use was made of teacher exposition, questioning and group work to promote high level thinking.
- Occasionally, the scope to challenge pupils to question their initial responses to material is slightly restricted because the teachers are too constrained by the published schemes of work and, for the same reason, lesson planning and delivery does not always ensure the activities are differentiated to match the range of pupils needs.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly providing them with useful feedback on their progress.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum for RE combines a careful pattern of modules linked to the Local Authority's published scheme of work with a more flexible incorporation of RE-related work within the wider creative curriculum of the school. This approach ensures the provision fully matches the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus and has secured the subject's strong position within the curriculum. It has also helped to develop the subject knowledge and confidence of the teachers.

- The coverage of religions across the school is clearly mapped and takes appropriate account of the pupils' own religious background. Significant attention has been paid to linking RE to the wider SEAL programme in the school, although, in practice, these links occasionally deflect the learning from a clear focus on RE-related objectives. The school is reviewing the sequencing and rationale of work related to learning about the Christian tradition where this is not entirely secure.
- The school has recognised it is now in a position to reduce its dependency on the exemplar scheme of work. There are plans to explore further the flexibility within the agreed syllabus to extend the ways RE can be integrated more effectively within the wider curriculum planning. This will, for example, extend the opportunities for pupils to play a more active role in planning and structuring their learning; release teachers to plan more independently; and, will enhance the scope to link RE to work in, for example, literacy.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are outstanding.

- The subject co-ordinator, with the very strong support of the senior leadership team, has done an excellent job in raising the status of the subject and guiding colleagues in its delivery.
- Very effective use has been made of the support available from the local authority to enthuse the staff and build a secure curriculum. The co-ordinator has paid very close attention to the requirements of the agreed syllabus while also seeking to be creative in her thinking about the subject.
- The subject's strong position is closely related to the school's wider commitment to the personal development of its pupils and the fostering of community cohesion.
- There are very good arrangements in place to monitor the provision embracing scrutiny of work and pupil interviews as well as classroom observation. The routine subject reviews are well-focused and thorough. A recently produced curriculum audit provided a sharp analysis of the subject's strengths and development priorities. This is matched closely to a very clear and well-focused improvement plan which reflects the commitment to raising standards. A good start has been made in establishing the assessment and recording arrangements for the subject.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Older pupils speak very confidently about the way the subject has helped them develop positive attitudes towards diversity and, as a result, they have a high regard for the views and lifestyles of those different from themselves. They are very clear that the subject has helped them counteract prejudice towards others. Links have been forged with some of the Christian and Muslim groups within the local community and there are regular opportunities to visit different places of worship.

Inclusion

The arrangements to ensure all pupils are included within the teaching of RE are good. The scheme of work has been designed to ensure the faith backgrounds of the pupils are recognised and valued. Very good use is made of in-class support to ensure all pupils can access the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring ways of using the agreed syllabus and its accompanying guidance more flexibly to extend the inclusion of RE within the school's wider model of curriculum planning
- developing the use made of levels in planning to support differentiation 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