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Mrs J Moore  
Headteacher  
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Athlone Ave  
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Dear Mrs Moore

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 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, the RE resources manager and the chair of Governors, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good with outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

The standards pupils attain in RE are broadly average but their achievement in the subject is good and in some cases outstanding.

- Pupils make a good start in the Foundation Stage quickly acquiring a familiarity with a wide range of aspects of religion. In the second year of the Foundation Stage they make particularly good progress and develop a wide subject vocabulary and a strong sense of the vibrancy and diversity within the world of religion.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils develop a good understanding of the two main traditions studied, Islam and Christianity. They recognise some of the

key features of each religion and appreciate the importance of each in the lives of believers. In one outstanding lesson, the pupils demonstrated a very clear understanding of the nativity story and offered imaginative and insightful responses into the significance of some of its symbolism. While they could talk successfully about aspects of Muslim practice, few could recall any stories linked to the life of Muhammad.

- Progress across Key Stage 2 is also good and, in some respects, outstanding. Pupils develop a strong body of knowledge and understanding about a wide range of features of religion. A particular area of strength relates to their ability to engage with and interpret patterns of symbolism in religion. Year 6 pupils had produced some very impressive extended independent writing about the symbolism in Holman Hunt's painting 'The Light of the World'. However, the pupils' ability to undertake independent investigative work into religion was less well developed.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is outstanding. Pupils enjoy RE. The subject makes a very effective contribution to the development of their ability to reflect on their own beliefs and values. They are developing the ability to use periods of quiet to reflect. They show respect for differences of viewpoint and a keen awareness of diversity and the relationship between religion and wider aspects of different people's way of life.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good with outstanding features.

- Lessons in RE are well-planned and organised. A wide range of well structured and often imaginative strategies are used to engage pupils' interest and promote good learning. Some very effective use is made of links to literacy and the creative dimension of the curriculum. A good lesson with Year 6 was skilfully planned to build on literacy links and promote pupils' understanding of the nature of symbolism and metaphor in religion. Elsewhere good use is made of role play and drama to stimulate engagement with story material in RE.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and, in the case of the best lessons, they set very high expectations and ensure activities challenge pupils to think hard. Very good use is made of ICT and the wide range of well-managed resources. Displays related to RE around the building help to secure pupils' interest and enthusiasm for the subject. The teaching assistants and other adults in classes are deployed effectively and they make, for example, a significance impact on the progress of those pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- Pupils often produce some impressive extended written work in RE. This tends to focus around attainment target 2 'learning from' religion and there is less independent written work related to work 'learning about' religion. This reflects the tendency to narrow the range of skills deployed to investigate religion. This narrowing also means the learning in relation to some aspects of RE is not sufficiently differentiated to challenge the more able.

- Pupils generally have a clear view about the purpose and direction of their learning. On occasions they are able to give very specific explanations about the ways of learning that had been selected. Marking and assessment is often of good quality; some effective use is being made of levels to inform pupils about the progress they are making.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good with outstanding features.

- The curriculum meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The school has also taken the initiative in starting the process of trialling and implementing the very recently published Bury agreed syllabus.
- The scheme of work is broad and balanced and has been skilfully constructed to reflect both the Christian heritage of the school and the more specific needs of its diverse community. Much of the work focuses on the Christian and Muslim traditions although attention is also given to the wider world of religion.
- The overall programme ensures good continuity and progression. Work on the Christian tradition is planned to secure a progressive understanding of the main beliefs, celebrations and practices of the faith. A strength of the provision is the emphasis placed on enabling the pupils to understand the significance of religion and its forms of expression in people's lives. While the curriculum is closely linked to the locally agreed syllabus there is scope to extend the use made of levels in the medium term planning.
- The curriculum is enriched by a number of other features of the provision. Good use is made of visits and visitors involving the local religious community. The pattern of lively and attractive displays around the school reflects a strong emphasis on the subject and the celebration of pupils' work in RE. Considerable emphasis is placed on tracking the links between RE and other curriculum areas as well as the wider contribution to pupils' personal development and the Every Child Matters agenda.

### Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are outstanding.

- Your coordination of RE is detailed and provides a strong vision for the subject. You are well supported by the staff and governors in the delivery of RE and the contribution made to the subject by the RE Resources Manager is outstanding. As a result, for example, the resources for the subject are extensive and very well organised.
- There are excellent arrangements in place to monitor the provision. The arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are strong. Good use is made of the analysis of assessment data together with a range of other activities to evaluate pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the curriculum. As a result the recently produced

and very impressive subject self-evaluation document carefully and accurately analyses the key strengths and areas for development.

- A well-focused improvement plan for the subject is in place with a set of clear and appropriate priorities targeted on improving provision and raising standards. There are clear plans already in place to implement the recently revised Bury agreed syllabus.
- The school has taken the initiative in getting actively involved in the work of the local SACRE and also benefits from good links with the local diocese.
- A particular and notable strength has been the arrangements to provide good professional development for all staff in the subject. A range of skilfully devised strategies have been used to develop subject knowledge and an understanding of effective learning in RE. This has been a key factor in securing the good provision and in raising standards in the subject.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes an outstanding contribution to the promotion of community cohesion and identifies this as part of the commitment to a Christian ethos. The subject makes a very positive contribution to developing pupils' awareness and respect for religious and cultural diversity. The organisation of the curriculum has been guided in part by the recognition of the need to value and celebrate the pupils' own faith traditions.

However, the school has gone much further in developing the ways RE can promote cohesion and harmony in the wider community. You and the governors have undertaken a careful review of the nature and make-up of the local religious communities. You have worked in close partnership with the local Christian and Muslim clergy to establish a pattern of activities using local resources to enhance learning in RE. The boxer Amir Khan has visited as part of a commitment to highlighting success within the local Muslim community. A range of activities linked to RE, such as festival celebrations in school and choir performances in the local church, have provided an important and successful context for encouraging parents from different traditions to meet together and appreciate the cultural and religious diversity of the local area. Much of this is linked into wider activities at the school related to their extended school work and family learning groups.

Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are good. The curriculum recognises and values diversity ensuring all pupils feel respected and make good progress. Teaching ensures all pupils are included in the learning; the arrangements in RE to support pupils with English as a second language are very effective. To date, the school has not analysed the assessment data in relation to the faith tradition of the pupils and this might prove a useful activity.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending the opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of investigation when 'learning about' religion

- using levels of attainment more systematically in the mid-term subject planning
- reviewing the provision made for using Muslim story material in Key Stage 1.

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, SACRE and Diocese of Manchester 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