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Mr M J Mihell
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Dear Mr Mihell

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 March 2008 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 yourself and the subject co-ordinator, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of an assembly and three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils in RE are broadly in line with expectations and their achievement is good.

- The standards reached by the pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are above the expectations of the agreed syllabus, while those at the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly in line with those expectations. Achievement across the school in RE is good. By the end of Year 2, pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the religions they have explored. They ask appropriate questions about religion and

recognise the significance which beliefs and practices have in people's lives. Their ability to talk with confidence about the significance of the Easter events was impressive as was their grasp of some important characteristics of the Muslim faith.

- Across Key Stage 2 pupils continue to acquire a good grasp of some key features of religion. At times their knowledge can be a little uncertain when they mix up information about different religions, but they develop a good grasp of the meaning of religious material. They often express ideas about areas of belief and value confidently and fluently. Occasionally, where the structure of some units lacks clarity, the pupils become a little uncertain about the links between aspects of their learning in the subject.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is good. Careful attention is paid to ensuring the subject makes a very positive contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The links with the social and emotional aspects of learning are strong. This was reflected in two good lessons where pupils explored notions of forgiveness and the idea of building solid foundations in life. The subject is effective in fostering a very positive attitude towards religious and cultural diversity and respecting difference. Pupils enjoy RE and find it of value.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- The subject is well-taught across the school. The teaching is characterised by: effective use of questioning; high expectations; use of a wide range of engaging and challenging tasks; and, good encouragement for pupils to take responsibility for their learning.
- Teachers have a good understanding of questions which need to be asked in order to extend and focus pupils' learning in RE. Good use is made of discussion to challenge pupils' thinking and enable them to see links between different aspects of the subject. In a Year 5/6 class some particularly effective use was made of structured group work to extend the level of challenge in work on the theme of forgiveness.
- In most lessons the sequencing of learning is very effective and ensures that pupils make good progress. Teachers explain the purpose of the activities carefully and consolidate learning effectively. Good use is made of displays to support and extend learning.
- Occasionally, uncertainty about the significance of some story material means that opportunities to extend pupils' understanding of its meaning within the tradition are missed.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum is related well to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Care has been taken to sequence units to take account of the mixed age classes. The school has chosen to go beyond the requirements of the syllabus in the selection of six religions for study

across Key Stage 2. It needs to monitor carefully the impact of this decision on the quality of learning and the availability of resources.

- RE work is carefully blocked alongside other foundation subjects to ensure that best use is made of time and to facilitate links with other areas of the curriculum. This arrangement is working well and is a major factor promoting good progress and ensuring pupils consolidate their learning effectively. As a result, there is a strong emphasis in RE on supporting the development of pupils' wider learning and language skills.
- The school has developed a number of very positive enrichment activities designed to provide pupils with the opportunity to gain first hand experience of religion. It has also introduced some interesting work using media stories about religion.
- The school is using the scheme of work published by the local authority as the basis for their planning. This has provided a secure and supportive framework within which the teachers have developed their confidence in teaching the subject. There is, however, a need to explore a more flexible and creative use of this resource to ensure the focus and structure of the learning is always clear to the teachers.
- Good use is being made of levelled criteria to develop manageable and effective mechanisms for assessing and recording pupils' progress.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE is good.

- The subject is well-led by the subject co-ordinator who is providing good support for her colleagues. The blocking of units and use of common religions across year groups is facilitating joint planning and sharing of ideas.
- Effective use is made of data to monitor pupils' progress and this has helped to identify areas for improvement. However, although the subject co-ordinator has a good grasp of the development priorities, the overall monitoring, reviewing and improvement planning arrangements for the subject are relatively unsystematic.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

The subject makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Teaching models a positive approach to diversity and has encouraged pupils to develop a very open-minded enquiring attitude to the lifestyles and beliefs of others. Enrichment activities have been designed to extend the pupils' experience of religious diversity. They include opportunities for pupils to exchange letters with pupils at a multi-faith school in Blackburn and to work with visitors from the Muslim and Christian traditions. There have also been opportunities for pupils to explore examples of some more controversial aspects of religion in the modern world. There is scope to extend these opportunities further.

Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of pupils in RE are good. Very good use is made of in-class support to ensure all pupils can make appropriate progress. The arrangements made for the few pupils who are withdrawn from RE at their parents' request are also good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring opportunities for the staff to develop their confidence in using the published scheme of work more creatively and flexibly
- formalising the arrangements for monitoring, reviewing and improvement planning in the subject.

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