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Mr P O'Rourke  
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Dear Mr O'Rourke

### Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 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 your self and the subject coordinator, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory with some good features and a good capacity for further improvement.

### Achievement and standards

The overall achievement of pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- The standards reached by the pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus. Those reached by the end of Key Stage 2 are above those expectations. Pupils make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 1 and in the lower junior class. Their progress in the upper junior class is good.
- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils show an above average ability to explain and interpret features of religious belief and practice. They can ask pertinent questions about religion and are beginning to use some

complex concepts effectively. These skills were evident in work they were doing exploring the themes of Easter and the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection. They also have a good appreciation of the importance of diversity in religion and a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the Jewish tradition. However, their understanding of the third faith selected for study, Islam, is much less secure. Some of the pupils' written work in RE is of a good standard although the range of their independent writing is quite limited.

- Elsewhere, across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and the lower juniors, the higher attaining pupils make good progress in developing their understanding of the connections between different features of both Christianity and Judaism and in appreciating the importance of religion in people's lives. However, their skills in investigation and enquiry are less well-developed because their learning is too narrow. Average and lower attaining pupils make satisfactory progress in terms of acquiring basic knowledge of some key features of the religions they study but are less adept at seeing connections between this knowledge and appreciating the links between aspects of practice.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is good. They enjoy finding out about different religions and the subject helps them appreciate diversity of belief and practice. They also respond positively to opportunities to explore their own ideas about religion when these are provided. There is scope to extend the opportunities for the subject to contribute more strongly to the development of pupils' creativity.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory with some important good features.

- As with the pattern of achievement in RE, the quality of teaching is slightly uneven.
- In the best lessons where aspects of learning are outstanding, the teaching embraces a very impressive understanding of the subject and high expectations and challenge. Very good use is made of highly effective questioning and discussion, a wide range of engaging resources and tasks, and opportunities for independent learning. The structure of learning is very well managed to ensure pupils are clear about the purpose and direction of their work.
- Elsewhere, lessons are carefully planned and orderly; some good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT), exposition and questioning; practical activities are carefully organised to ensure pupils remain on task and enjoy their learning. However, there is not enough opportunity to develop the skills of enquiry and most tasks are not suitably differentiated to ensure the needs of all pupils in mixed age classes are met. The range of resources used to help pupils learn is too limited and this means some do not consolidate their learning effectively.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is broadly satisfactory.

- Great care has been taken to produce a detailed and comprehensive scheme of work for RE. The plans secure coverage of the requirements for the locally agreed syllabus and have drawn carefully on the local authority scheme of work supplemented by material from other national and diocesan materials. A good start has been made in tailoring and sequencing the curriculum to match the needs of mixed age classes. There is scope to extend the pattern of differentiation within units to support better the needs of the wide range of age and prior attainment in each class. Some of the published planning being used is heavily focused on teaching with limited emphasis on developing learning skills and this does have an impact on the progress pupils make in some lessons.
- A number of links have been created between RE and other areas of the curriculum although some are better conceived than others. The pattern of delivery of RE in some classes tends to limit the opportunities for more extended cross curricular links to, or example literacy or the creative arts.
- Care has been taken to secure a balanced and progressive approach to teaching about Christianity and Judaism and the school has plans to ensure work on Islam is better focused and more coherent.
- Very good use is made of enrichment activity using the local church community and other Christian places of worship in the wider area. While in the past the school has benefited from a visit from a representative of the Jewish tradition, there are currently no links with faith communities other than Christian.
- A start has been made to develop a simple mechanism for assessing pupils' progress using the level criteria for each unit of study. This is a good arrangement but requires further refinement to ensure the criteria are not too cumbersome and narrow.

## Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are good with some outstanding features.

- The subject benefits from good subject leadership from a dedicated and experienced RE co-ordinator. She has an excellent understanding of the subject and has a clear grasp of the priorities for improvement which are embraced within a wide ranging development plan.
- The sequencing of developments and the implementation of more rigorous monitoring arrangements have been carefully considered in the light of recent changes in staffing and the appointment of two newly qualified teachers. The capacity for improvement in RE is good and there is a clear whole school commitment to raising achievement and securing more consistent teaching of the subject.
- The subject also benefits from a high level of governor interest and support. The high quality of the RE leadership is reflected in the impressive guidance provided recently for governors by the subject co-ordinator. This included a useful review of the provision for RE in other local primary and secondary schools.

- The subject co-ordinator has had good opportunities for professional development but, as yet and for perfectly legitimate reasons, there has been limited training in the subject for the other teachers.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils enjoy RE and value the way it helps them develop their appreciation of diversity and the role which religion plays in their local community. The links with local churches are used well to support the way the school contributes to local community life. Opportunities to provide pupils with first hand experience of non-Christian communities in the local region are not well-developed.

Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are satisfactory overall. Good use of in-class support ensures all pupils are engaged in their learning. In some cases, the planning of tasks does not take enough account of the varying ages and abilities within each class and this impedes the progress of some less able pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sharing good practice to ensure greater consistency in the quality of pupils' learning in RE across the school
- ensuring work in RE is appropriately matched to the range of ability and age of pupils in all classes
- providing more opportunities for creative and investigative learning in RE
- implementing the plans to secure greater coherence in the teaching about Islam
- exploring opportunities to develop the use visits or visitors linked to non-Christian traditions.

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 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