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Miss S Holland
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Dear Miss Holland

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and children, during my visit on 16 May 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 creative thinking in RE.

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 your 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 the expectations of the agreed syllabus and their achievement is good.

- By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils can identify key features of the religions they have studied and are beginning to use religious terminology appropriately. A strength of their learning is their

understanding that religion is diverse and important in the lives of many people.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have made further progress in drawing together their learning about religions to understand the connections between belief and practice. They also make effective use of some of the technical language used in studying religion.
- There is unevenness in the progress pupils make in RE across the school but overall pupils make good progress. In one Year 4 lesson the pupils were able to write fluently and in detail about the meaning and significance of key aspects of the Christian celebration of the Last Supper. Pupils make less progress when work is less challenging and particularly where they are given lower level written tasks to complete. Their progress is stronger in relation to 'learning about' rather than 'learning from' religion because they are given too few opportunities to explore and debate their own ideas about, and responses to, religion and belief.
- While all groups of pupils make good progress, the achievement of many of the Muslim pupils is particularly effective reflecting the careful way in which the school develops their confidence in talking about their own faith.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is good. Pupils enjoy the subject and show a genuine interest in exploring different beliefs and ways of life. They develop a strong sense of the value of diversity and a respect for the views of others. The subject makes a good contribution to the development of the pupils' speaking and listening skills but the potential of RE to support wider thinking skills and literacy is not always fully exploited.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- The teaching of RE benefits from a number of good features. Lessons are often well-planned with good use made of a range of resources. Some of the learning activities are imaginative and engaging. For example, good use was made of a renaissance painting of the baptism to stimulate learning in a Year 2 class. Much of the questioning and discussion is effective and there are some good opportunities to use group work and independent writing tasks. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and learning assistants are well-deployed in lessons.
- Some other aspects of teaching and learning are less effective and there is some variability in quality across the school. Group work is not always managed well and, as a result, some pupils lose concentration and drift off task. Some of the writing tasks are low level and inappropriate.
- A key area for improvement is the way activities in some lessons are sequenced and linked together. On occasions, the planned activities do not build appropriately on pupils' previous work and the most obvious

pattern of learning is not deployed. As a result, the progression in pupils' learning is not always secure.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory with a good capacity for improvement.

- The RE curriculum meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus and is well-matched to the needs and background of the pupils.
- The outstanding provision of enrichment activities to support learning in RE is a major strength of the school. As a result the subject is making a very important contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. A wide range of visits to, and visitors from, a variety of local religious communities, including an interesting project with Year 6 using a faith trail linked to the work of the Bolton Interfaith Council, are used to extend the pupils' first hand experience of different faiths. This provision is having a positive impact on pupils' learning but is also proving effective as a context for encouraging parents and the wider community to become more involved in the work of the school.
- Until recently the pattern of delivery of RE on a week-by-week basis has tended to narrow the range of teaching and learning and has limited the pupils' progress. The pattern of the curriculum has been very closely based on the exemplification material produced to accompany the agreed syllabus. However, the school is in the process of developing a more creative approach to the whole curriculum and is exploring the flexibility in the agreed syllabus. As a result it is starting to move away from the previously rather fragmented RE provision towards a more blocked and integrated approach to the delivery of the subject. The school's evaluation of the initial impact of the new model is that it is leading to more sustained learning and better links across the curriculum. It is proving more empowering and engaging for the teachers, encouraging the introduction of more creative approaches to learning. It is also providing opportunities for the pupils to take a more active role in shaping their learning.
- The assessment guidance produced by the local authority has proved helpful in developing the way pupils' progress is monitored. A simple but effective process of recording pupils' achievement is in place and is being used reasonably consistently with careful reference to differentiated learning objectives. This was being used to good effect in a Year 1 lesson where pupils' understanding of aspects of the Muslim way of life was being assessed.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE is satisfactory with good features.

- The subject co-ordinator, who is well-supported by the senior leadership team, is experienced, enthusiastic and dedicated to RE. She has been successful in raising the profile of the subject and in promoting the impressive subject enrichment programme.
- Opportunities for professional subject development of the staff have been limited but the recent inclusion of RE in the school's thinking about the creative curriculum is proving a useful context to re-energise thinking about the subject.
- The arrangements in place to monitor, review and plan for the improvement of RE are working satisfactorily. However, they require a more rigorous and focused structure in order to ensure they deliver a sharper evaluation of the subject's needs. There are plans to evaluate the impact of the 'creative curriculum' on pupils' learning and it will be important to include RE in this review.

Creative thinking in RE

The school has begun to focus more attention on the place of creativity in RE. It has rightly identified the need to explore the flexibility in the locally agreed syllabus as a basis for a more effective integration of RE within its innovative curriculum developments. This is beginning to encourage teachers to explore new ideas and move away from over-reliance on older published exemplification material. The move to blocking RE and exploring links with other areas of the curriculum, including literacy, is very positive. It is beginning to encourage the pupils to use more creative thinking and ways of expressing their ideas in RE. The school's aim is to secure greater consistency in the way this innovation impacts on learning in RE across the whole school.

Inclusion

The inclusion of all pupils in their RE learning is good. Work is often, though not always, appropriately differentiated to match the range of pupils including those with more profound learning needs. Good use is made of in-class support to ensure all groups of pupils can engage in the learning and make appropriate progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring further the scope for flexibility in the agreed syllabus in order to support the integration of RE within the wider curriculum innovations
- developing a more focused approach to monitoring the subject, with a specific emphasis on evaluating the impact of the creative curriculum on RE

- securing greater consistency in the quality of teaching with stronger focus on the way RE can promote thinking skills and literacy.

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