

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



23 June 2008

Mrs K Stallman
Headteacher
Moss Park Junior School
Moss Park Rd
Stretford
Manchester
M32 9HR

Dear Mrs Stallman

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 20 June 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 two governors, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of four lessons and a whole school assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good, with outstanding leadership and capacity for further improvement.

Achievement and standards

Standards in RE are just above the expectations of the agreed syllabus and pupils' achievement is good.

- As the pupils progress through the school they develop a strong body of knowledge about different religions. By the time they leave they have a good framework within which to place their understanding of different faiths.
- The personal development of pupils in RE is outstanding. This is reflected in their interest in religion and their understanding of the

importance of respect for others. They develop a very positive attitude towards diversity and a strong awareness of the importance of valuing the beliefs and lifestyles of others.

- The programme of enrichment activities, the overall values and ethos of the school, and the opportunities provided to learn about religion through first hand experience are key factors promoting this positive achievement and personal development in RE.
- The progress pupils make in acquiring and developing higher level skills in the context of RE is less secure. While there are examples of pupils making very good progress in developing skills of enquiry in RE, these are not promoted consistently in all lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- RE lessons are well-organised and carefully planned. Relationships with pupils are very positive and teachers model the values at the heart of the subject effectively. Behaviour in lessons is good and the activities usually engage pupils' attention and interest. Some good use is made of resources and information communication technology (ICT) to promote learning. Stimulating RE displays are often prominent in classrooms.
- There are examples of particularly good teaching where pupils are challenged to explore ideas and questions for themselves. For example, a lesson on Sikh weddings in Year 3 provided an excellent opportunity for pupils to identify and prioritise questions to ask about the celebration. There are also some good examples of the use of creative writing in RE.
- However, in some RE lessons pupils are too dependent on their teacher and there is too much emphasis on the delivery of content rather than the extension of learning skills or investigation of concepts. There is some uncertainty about ways of structuring learning in order to extend pupils' thinking and integrate the two key areas of attainment: 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. As a result, some lessons lack a clear focus and the sequence of activities does not always relate specifically enough to a key objective for learning.
- Although teachers mark pupils' work regularly, offering feedback on their progress, too much of the written work is not independent and the marking is therefore of limited value; the opportunities to extend pupils' skills in literacy are not strong enough.

Quality of curriculum

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

- The RE curriculum is based closely on the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The subject leader has recently re-worked those

requirements into a scheme of work designed to match the needs and experience of the pupils. A number of useful key questions and assessment foci have been identified to help teachers to plan and pitch work. The school is currently implementing and evaluating the impact of the new scheme of work.

- Care has been taken to try to balance work across the two attainment targets and to ensure pupils gain a broad understanding of the diversity of religions. Some units have been introduced to provide pupils with more in-depth learning, including an interesting one on religion in the local area.
- A simple and manageable approach to assessment and recording has been established using the levels of attainment in the agreed syllabus.
- A major strength of the curriculum is the outstanding provision of a wide range of enrichment activities, building on the school's links in the local community. Very good use is made of the expertise of parents and representatives of local religious groups to extend pupils' learning. In addition, the programme of assemblies makes a very positive contribution to the fostering of the values of RE.
- Some factors restrict the effectiveness of the curriculum. Some of the planning, although based closely on the agreed syllabus, does not provide an effective integration of the two attainment targets and does not sequence units of work appropriately. The planning is not providing teachers with a clear enough model of ways of sequencing the pupils' learning and this is a factor leading to the loss of focus and structure in some lessons.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are outstanding.

- Your leadership of the subject is a major strength of the provision and underpins the excellent capacity for further improvement. In this you are very well supported by the governors and staff. RE has a high profile in the school and is strongly integrated with the core commitment to promoting community cohesion and the well-being of the pupils.
- A key success has been the involvement of parents in the developments in RE. A number took advantage of the opportunity to review the school's RE policy. Great care has been taken to explain the school's approach to the subject to parents in order to secure their trust and confidence. They have been encouraged to take an active role in RE by visiting and sharing their experience with the pupils. As a result, the school has been able to use the opportunities provided by RE to promote understanding within the local community.
- The arrangements for monitoring, self-evaluation, action planning and reviewing in the subject are exemplary. As a result you have a very clear idea of the priorities for development. A strategic approach has

been adopted towards staff development in RE and good progress has been made in developing the resource base for the subject.

Creative thinking in RE

While there are some good examples of pupils thinking creatively in the context of RE, overall there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use higher level thinking skills. To date, the school has taken a cautious approach to developing a more creative approach to curriculum planning in RE because of the need to build teachers' confidence in implementing the new schemes of work for the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included using the opportunities provided by the planned evaluation of the new scheme of work for:

- reviewing the sequencing of units to ensure they provide effective progression in pupils' learning
- building a stronger model of the process of learning linking the two attainment targets more effectively
- encouraging a more challenging and investigative approach to the study of religion
- ensuring written tasks in RE make a stronger contribution to the promotion of 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