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Miss Charles and Mr Thomas
Headteachers
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Dear Miss Charles and Mr Thomas

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Alan Brine HMI on 16 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 the subject's contribution to 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils in RE are in line with the expectations in the agreed syllabus and reflect good achievement overall.

- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils develop a clear understanding of the significance which religion plays in some people's lives. They are able to identify key similarities and differences between different religious traditions. However, while they acquire a reasonable basic knowledge and understanding of key features of religions, their ability to use higher order skills of enquiry, interpretation and evaluation in RE is more limited.

- There is some variability in the progress pupils make in RE across the school. On occasions, where planning does not make the connection between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion clear, pupils do not link these aspects of their learning together appropriately.
- RE makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' wider personal development. In particular, they demonstrate an ability to reflect on values and have a well developed sense of tolerance and respect for others. Pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject and have increasing awareness of how people's beliefs and values are sometimes underpinned by religious teachings.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Lessons in RE are well structured and organised; classes are well managed and relationships with pupils are excellent. Pupils from Year 3 onwards have good opportunities for discussion in RE and, as a result, develop the skills of listening and expressing their points of view in an orderly and secure environment.
- At its best, teaching is imaginative and lively. Lessons proceed at a good pace and effective use is made of discussion, exposition and questioning. Good support is provided for those pupils who find aspects of their work difficult.
- The school is in the process of developing assessment arrangements in the subject. Marking is regular and pupils are often given feedback on their work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work for RE take appropriate account of the current Birmingham agreed syllabus and plans are in place to start the process of implementing the revised syllabus from September 2008. There are detailed long and medium term plans in place. While careful attention is paid to matching the curriculum to the needs and interests of the pupils, insufficient attention is paid in the planning to the progressive development of the skills of the subject.
- The subject has some strong links with the personal, social and health education programme in the school. There are also some creative links made with other areas of the curriculum – including some very imaginative work on the holocaust in Year 6 linking with history. Occasionally, however, the planning does not ensure that a focus on RE objectives is secured. The use and integration of the two attainment targets is not always made clear.
- There is excellent enrichment of the RE curriculum through the use of visits to, and visitors from, the local religious communities.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE is good.

- There is a strong collegiate approach to leadership of the subject. The school has a commitment to improving its provision for RE within its wider drive to promote the pupils' well-being.
- While the school is in the process of resolving uncertainties about the leadership of the subject from next September, plans are in place to review the curriculum in the light of the newly agreed local syllabus.
- The school has recognised the need to extend the arrangements for assessment in the subject in line with the levels of attainment identified in the 2008 agreed syllabus.
- While the current arrangements for monitoring the subject are satisfactory, there is scope to ensure a clearer focus on pupils' progress and the consistency of planning across the school.
- RE in the school makes a strong contribution to community cohesion, PSHE and personal development.

Creative thinking in RE

There has been some creative thinking in the school about ways of linking RE with other areas of the curriculum in order to extend the level of challenge and help pupils integrate their learning more effectively. For example, the links with a history unit examining the Second World War challenged the pupils to examine some difficult concepts in an imaginative way. At present, however, the opportunities for pupils to use higher order skills of thinking are not developed consistently across all aspects of the learning in RE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using the opportunity provided by the new locally agreed syllabus to develop an RE curriculum which secures greater progression and challenge in pupils' learning.

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

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector