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Mr R Pearson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Pearson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 October 2008 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE the visit had a particular focus on creative thinking in the subject.

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 satisfactory with a number of good features.

Achievement and standards

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

- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils reach standards which are in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. However, there is some variability in the progress pupils make in RE across the school. For example, where planning does not make clear the connection between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion,

pupils do not link these aspects of their learning together appropriately.

- In the Foundation Stage, pupils begin to identify some of the characteristics of religion and link these to their own experience. For example, pupils were able to appreciate that certain behaviour is wrong and understand why a community has rules to live by.
- By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils can talk about what happens in some religious activities, identifying some key features. For example, they were able to sequence the elements of ritual washing, suggesting simple reasons why Muslims complete this activity before they pray.
- In 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. While they acquire a reasonable basic knowledge and understanding of key features of religions, their ability to use more demanding skills of enquiry in RE is more limited.
- The subject is providing good opportunities to extend pupils' skills in speaking and listening and in using music, drama and art, although there is further scope to promote their thinking and writing skills in RE.
- RE makes a satisfactory and growing contribution to pupils' wider personal development. In particular, they demonstrate an increasing ability to reflect on values and have a developing a sense of tolerance and respect for others. Pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject and an increasing awareness of how some people's beliefs and values are underpinned by religious teachings.

## Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Lessons in RE are well structured and organised; classes are managed effectively and relationships with pupils are good. Teachers use good stimulus activities to engage pupils' interest and ensure they are involved actively in their learning.
- At its best, teaching is imaginative and sensitive with good use of group work to extend pupils' thinking. For example, pupils in Year 5 engaged in a useful mind-mapping exercise designed to extend their understanding of places of worship.
- While the best teaching secures good sustained learning that is based on clear objectives, occasionally these features are less evident. When this occurs, learning is less challenging and focused, with activities not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils. In some cases, teachers are not secure in their

understanding of the subject and are over reliant on the local authority's published scheme of work.

- The school is in the process of developing assessment arrangements in RE. Marking is regular and pupils are sometimes given helpful feedback on their work.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work for RE take close account of the locally agreed syllabus. 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 consideration is paid in the planning to the progressive development of the skills of the subject. Some progress has been made in developing the familiarity of staff with the levels of attainment in the agreed syllabus. However, limited use is made of levels in planning or assessment tasks.
- The school is exploring new and creative models of delivery of the subject through closer integration of RE with other subject areas. Initial indications are that this is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and teachers' confidence.
- There is good enrichment of the RE curriculum with visits to, and visitors from, the local religious communities.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The subject co-ordinator provides good leadership for the subject. She has established a rigorous pattern of support and monitoring of the subject across the school. The pattern of monitoring RE includes pupil interviews, book and planning scrutiny, and observation of teaching. This has enabled her to identify clear priorities for improvement and staff development.
- A good start has been made in exploring ways in which RE might be incorporated within the more creative approach to curriculum planning being introduced across the school.
- The school has a commitment to improving its provision for RE within its wider drive to promote the pupils' well-being.
- 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 locally agreed syllabus.

## 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. However, some teachers are over-reliant on published exemplification material. Lessons and other activities are delivered in a wide range of ways using information and communication technology, art, drama and discussion. At present, the opportunities for pupils to think more creatively about their learning in RE are not developed consistently across all areas of their work in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the RE curriculum to secure greater progression and challenge in pupils' learning
- improving the provision for RE by exploring further ways the subject can be linked into a more creative approach to planning
- providing more opportunities for extended writing in RE.

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