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Mrs C Hague
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hague

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 October 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 creative thinking.

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, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards across the school are in line with those outlined in the Oxfordshire agreed syllabus. Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school.
- The youngest pupils are able to compare the experiences of people in religious stories with their own experiences and feelings suggesting, for example, reasons why we should be kind and helpful to each other.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils are able to use simple religious words and phrases appropriately. They can identify various festivals and say why

they are important to a particular religion. However, pupils are less adept at beginning to recognise similarities and differences between religions.

- By the end of Year 6, pupils appreciate the importance of religion in people's lives. They can, for example, explain the significance some key features of religious practice have for the members of a faith group. Too often, however, activities related to 'learning about religion' lack depth and pupils do not extend their skills in critically evaluating information. As a result, pupils do not always develop their ability to relate to religious material to their own experience or thinking. Where specific teaching approaches challenge pupils' to think for themselves achievement is better.
- Attitudes towards the subject are positive; pupils enjoy RE and welcome opportunities to build confidence in a subject they value because 'there are no right or wrong answers'. They respond well in discussions. They work co-operatively and listen well to each others' points of view. Pupils are given time in lessons to reflect on their feelings and thoughts. Most show positive attitudes to the subject and find RE interesting.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- Teaching is characterised by warm relationships with pupils. Lessons are well planned. Teachers have sound subject knowledge. They research the topics well and often present information accurately and carefully. Information and communication technology and interactive whiteboards are used effectively to enhance their learning.
- Learning often proceeds at a good pace and effective use is made of exposition and questioning to stimulate and engage pupils' interest. However, tasks do not challenge the higher attaining pupils.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school is currently at a point of change in relation to planning the RE curriculum. The RE subject coordinator is in the process of developing new units of work. Careful attention is paid to matching the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. A curriculum map is in place that blends a thematic approach to the subject with more systematic work on Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. Care has been taken to try to balance work on the two areas of attainment. A suitable range of activities is planned but too often work does not always extend the most able. While some medium term planning is well informed by the use of levels, this is often lost when the curriculum is translated into practice. Some units are challenging, while

others tend to over-emphasise lower level collection of information about the features of religion. As a result, the contribution being made by the subject to the pupils' wider learning and literacy skills is restricted.

- Good links are made with the wider Personal, Social, Health and Education curriculum, in particular the values curriculum, and this supports the pupils' personal development well. There is scope to explore stronger links with literacy as part of a drive to increase the level of challenge in some areas of the pupils' learning in RE.
- Assessment opportunities are securely in place. The use of the, 'I can' statements is a useful tool in setting out the links with prior and subsequent learning. Furthermore, they are a positive step in enabling teachers to understand the level at which the pupils are performing. However, this information is not currently used to refine planning in the light of on-going assessment.
- There is some use of visits and visitors to enrich pupils' experiences. However, given the limited direct experience that most pupils have of religion, there is scope to extend this further.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- Appropriate monitoring of teaching and learning in RE takes place on a regular basis.
- The developments in the curriculum are positive and offer potential to improve RE and raise standards. The school has recognised that there is more work to be done to make sure that the integration of RE within a more creative and skills based curriculum is effective and meaningful.
- Resources are well organised and wide-ranging.

Creative Thinking

The school recognises the potential of the subject to use creative thinking to make a stronger contribution to pupils' learning. At present too much of the work in RE lacks challenge, although there are clear examples of better provision particularly in Key Stage 1. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the idea of creativity is not too focused on the use of practical activities at the expense of developing pupils' thinking about religion. A sound start has been made in exploring creative ways of teaching the subject as part of a more integrated curriculum. However, further work is needed in ensuring that pupils' thinking skills are fully integrated into this approach.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending the opportunities for pupils to have first hand opportunities of religious communities through the use of fieldwork or visitors
- raising the level of challenge, particularly for the more able,

- using the levels of attainment to inform planning and secure progression across the school.

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