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Mrs C Fenton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fenton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 December 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.

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 at the end of Key Stage 2 are below those expected in the Wolverhampton agreed syllabus. Nevertheless, there are examples of pupils making good progress in developing their knowledge of a range of key features of religion.
- In Key Stage 1, standards are broadly average reflecting satisfactory achievement. Most pupils are able to respond to and identify various festivals and celebrations, suggesting why they are important to believers. For example, pupils were able to identify that certain foods often form part of religious celebration.
- Pupils in Foundation Stage respond appropriately to simple questions about familiar religious events. For example, pupils are able to talk in very simple terms about how the nativity story relates to the celebration of Christmas.

- While there are examples of good achievement, this is not consistent across the school. For example, pupils do not have enough opportunities to explore key concepts and investigate connections between different features of a religion. There is also scope to extend pupils knowledge of how religion can influence and inspire people's lives.
- The contribution of RE to supporting pupils' personal development is good. Pupils show positive attitudes to the subject. In lessons, pupils work well in pairs and groups. Even the youngest pupils show respect for the diversity of traditions within the school.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- Teachers use good stimulus activities to engage the pupils' interest and ensure they are actively involved in the lessons. Where RE is taught by the subject leader, learning is purposeful and the work is challenging with group work used effectively to extend pupils' thinking. However, where RE is taught by others, some of the work is too focused on learning information about religion and does not develop pupils' RE skills well enough.
- Staff have a clear understanding of the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool and use the electronic whiteboard effectively. Pupils benefit from the use of a good variety of relevant websites.
- Assessment opportunities are limited. Planning and assessment are not based on the levels and criteria contained in the locally agreed syllabus. Therefore, teachers are unable to provide an overall judgement on pupils' progress and as a result, they are sometimes unable to adjust their teaching to meet the pupils' needs more precisely.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is well matched to the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of the pupils. The balance of work ensures that those from different religious or cultural backgrounds progress equally well. The Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian traditions are well represented in the scheme of work.
- There are detailed long and medium term plans in place. However planning over-emphasises subject content at the expense of making each unit of work more challenging in terms of developing the important skills of enquiry and evaluation. This is because the school has yet to implement fully the 2006 locally agreed syllabus. Much of the school's work still follows the previous agreed syllabus. This has slowed the process of developing the teachers' familiarity with planning more demanding and challenging work because they are unfamiliar with the expectations in the current syllabus.
- Pupils' skills in literacy are not reinforced enough in RE lessons, particularly in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2. This is one reason why some of the good teaching is not always being translated into good overall achievement.
- The school engages with a number of local Christian groups to enhance the pupils' learning. For example, Year 5 pupils are currently involved in a long

term project with a local church which through the use of art, drama and music enables pupils to explore religious and moral issues.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The RE coordinator is providing the subject with an increasingly clear sense of purpose after a period of serious staffing disruption. With the support of the senior leadership team she is re-establishing the status of the subject. She has a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses with a commitment to securing improvement.
- The school has recognised the need to extend the arrangements for assessment in the subject in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus.
- The current arrangements for monitoring RE are informal and there is scope to ensure a clearer focus on pupils' progress and on the consistency of assessment and quality of teaching in the subject. A large proportion of the teaching of RE is carried out by a higher level teaching assistant but the impact of provision has not been closely monitored.

Creative Thinking

The school is at the very early stage of looking at creative thinking in the subject. Currently RE lessons and other activities are delivered in a wide range of ways using ICT, art, drama and discussion. Care needs to be taken to ensure that these creative activities are designed in ways that further support the development of pupils' thinking about religion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using the agreed syllabus more effectively to improve planning and raise standards in RE
- securing greater consistency in the quality of planning and assessment of RE
- monitoring the quality of teaching and learning especially where it is taught by teaching assistants.

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 K Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector