

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
enquires@ofsted.gov.uk



20 October 2008

Miss E Hargreaves  
Headteacher  
Feniscowles Primary School  
Livesey Branch Road  
Feniscowles  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB2 5EG

Dear Miss Hargreaves

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 October 2008 to look at work in RE.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had 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 staff, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is good.

- By the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 many pupils reach standards in RE which are above the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus. This represents good overall achievement.
- Pupils make good progress in the Foundation stage; in one Reception class, for example, they were able to talk with some confidence about the way Christians celebrate harvest. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils develop a broad knowledge and understanding of the key features of a range of religions. They understand the importance of religions in many people's lives and can talk about aspects of their own experience which link to religion. For example, pupils in Year 1 talked with interest and some insight about the words they associate with the idea of God.

- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have developed further their knowledge of religions and recognise some of the main similarities and differences between faiths. Their ability to explore the area of shared human experience highlighted in the agreed syllabus is particularly good.
- There is some unevenness in the progress pupils make across the two main areas of attainment in the agreed syllabus. Their ability to explain their 'learning from' religion is sometimes stronger than their 'learning about' religion. The opportunities to develop higher level investigative skills when exploring specific religions are sometimes limited.
- The contribution of RE to pupils' personal development and well-being is outstanding. They quickly develop a respect for, and interest in, diversity. The strength in the area of 'learning from' religion ensures the subject makes a very positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In one Year 3 lesson, for example, pupils rose to the challenge of exploring the life of Martin Luther King and offered thoughtful ideas about such ideas as leadership and 'standing up for what is right'; they also made some interesting suggestions about their own personal dreams for the future.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- RE lessons are well-structured and carefully planned. Teachers use a wide range of different teaching and learning activities to engage and extend pupils' learning. Pupils are well-managed and good use is made of different strategies to promote good discussion and encourage pupils to express personal opinions and viewpoints. In one Year 5 lesson, for example, very effective use was made of thinking skills strategies to encourage pupils to explore some of the moral dilemmas posed by one of the parables of Jesus.
- Relationships in RE lessons are excellent and expectations are high. Teachers adopt an appropriately open and sensitive approach towards the subject.
- On occasions, there are too few opportunities for pupils to undertake more independent investigations into religion and some of the written tasks lack challenge. While work is marked, the school is aware that limited progress has been made in implementing more robust assessment arrangements in RE.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The schemes of work for RE are closely matched to the requirements and exemplar planning in the locally agreed syllabus. The subject has a secure place within the curriculum. The regular RE lessons are complemented by a rich range of wider activities including focus days on specific themes such as India and other enrichment activities with sessions on, for example, multi-cultural dance planned jointly with other local schools. The school has identified the need to extend the use of field work in RE.
- The RE programme includes a strong focus on the Christian tradition which is appropriately balanced by work on a range of other traditions. While much of the RE is currently taught on a weekly basis, the school is keen to explore other models of delivery to provide an opportunity to develop more sustained investigative work. Older pupils expressed the view that their learning in

relation to Christianity can sometimes seem repetitive and they would welcome more challenge in this area of their work.

- Some of the medium term planning does not make the key concepts and questions which lie at the heart of a unit of work clear enough and, as a result, the focus of the learning is sometimes slightly uncertain and links between lessons in a sequence are not secure.
- Increasingly the school is using levels to help inform the medium term planning however as yet these are not being translated consistently into individual lesson plans to support differentiation of the learning.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- RE is well co-ordinated by an experienced and knowledgeable subject leader. She is well supported by the senior leadership team. Arrangements for monitoring, reviewing and improving the subject are well-established and followed carefully. There is a clear and well-judged policy for the subject although this needs to be extended to include reference to the parental right of withdrawal.
- The subject leader has accessed RE support networks provided in conjunction with the local diocese and has undertaken some further professional subject development.
- The curriculum documentation provides teachers with strong support and a clear basis for much of their planning. A start has been made in developing assessment arrangements through the introduction of an annotated portfolio of exemplar work. Care has been taken to audit the schemes of work against the revised locally agreed syllabus and a staff meeting planned for later this term will focus teachers on some of its newer elements.

## Creative thinking in RE

Opportunities to develop creative thinking in RE are good particularly in the context of 'learning from' religion where pupils are often encouraged to use a range of activities to explore and reflect on feelings, values and beliefs. The school is also exploring new ways of delivering RE by extending its links with the more integrated and topic based curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthening medium term planning to ensure the focus for learning, particularly in relation to 'learning about' religion, is clearer
- providing more opportunities for independent extended writing in RE
- using levels in lesson planning to ensure work is differentiated to meet the needs of all the pupils.

We hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As explained in our previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE. The letter 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