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Mrs C Singleton
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Dear Mrs Singleton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 January 2009 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 use of 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is good.

- In both key stages, the majority of pupils reach standards at least in line with the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus. Some, however, because they are set challenging and well focussed tasks, go beyond these expectations and show that they are able to deal with complex ideas, such as in their awareness of some common features which are characteristic of religious ideas. This is due, at least in part, to the encouragement pupils are given from an early age, to ask

questions about why people hold particular beliefs, and about how others' beliefs and values may impinge on their outlooks and ideas.

- A particular feature of their achievement is the pupils' progress across both attainment targets in RE and their understanding of the inter-connection between them. This is unusually clear from an early age, and includes pupils in Key Stage 1 who are able to articulate the value to themselves of what they are studying. The emphasis in subject teaching is sharply focussed on exploring ideas and concepts. As a result pupils are able to make links between different aspects of their learning and sometimes show perceptive insight when challenged with more demanding questions. In turn, some ask unusually thoughtful questions themselves, and their conversations with their peers in groups and with adults show that they are absorbing what they have learned effectively.
- Although the pupils live and work in an environment which has limited cultural diversity, they have a refreshing openness to ideas and outlooks different from their own. Older pupils are able to explain why their own awareness of different religious traditions is important to them as they grow up in the modern world. As a result, RE contributes significantly to the pupils' wider personal development, encouraging them to be open and receptive to new ideas.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is outstanding.

- The basis of effective learning is provided by quality teaching which embodies some simple but clear principles. Planning at all levels is coherent and highly effective. On a daily basis teachers are considering new ideas and techniques. The elements that make up the lessons are sharply focussed on the quality of learning, for example, when looking at a story from a number of different perspectives or exploring the difference between ordinary everyday journeys and pilgrimage. As a result, pupils are highly motivated to explore ideas further and become fully engaged in their learning.
- A particular strength of the quality of teaching is shown in the way questions for discussion are prepared beforehand so that progression in thinking is built into pupils' learning. The question 'why' is prominent in discussions with Key Stage 1 pupils. They are encouraged to use their imagination in thinking about their responses to questions. At best, they are able to begin the process of empathising with the situation of others.
- Another significant feature of the quality of teaching is the way it promotes pupils' awareness of the aims of RE. This is seen both in the way teachers and pupils interact with both attainment targets during a lesson so that the one informs the other, and particularly in the way pupils are encouraged to reflect on these targets at the end of the lesson to consolidate their learning.

- The school is working to develop its processes in assessment for learning. Pupils currently receive helpful and supportive feedback on their work and, through comments appropriate to their age and ability, they are encouraged to respond to new suggestions and ideas.

Quality of the RE curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is good.

- The school has been particularly effective in the way in which it is implementing the locally agreed syllabus, selecting guidance and ideas to provide a coherent scheme of work with clear continuity and progression. There is a very well tuned balance between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. The strength of this is evident in the pupils' own understanding of the place of RE in their learning. Continuity and progression is further enhanced by the subject leader's involvement in a local pyramid group where issues of transition and forward planning into the next phase of learning are a focus for ongoing discussion.
- Pupils' learning is enriched by visits to, and participation in the activities of, the parish church and by engagement with visitors, including parents, who are able to share relevant experiences with the pupils. The school is exploring ways of widening the opportunities for pupils to meet a broader spectrum of people with differing religious beliefs and commitments.

Leadership and management of RE

Subject leadership and management in RE are outstanding.

- The subject is excellently co-ordinated by an experienced teacher. Very effective, clear and detailed medium and long term planning helps to ensure continuity in learning, and provides a vehicle for ensuring that pupils make good and sustained progress. Weekly planning and exchange of ideas between teachers ensures that the programme of learning in both key stages is interesting and challenging for all pupils.
- Your own close involvement in ensuring that there is a clear structure and sufficient time for the subject leader to plan, monitor and evaluate the learning programme of RE is another factor which contributes significantly to its effectiveness. This includes the effective monitoring of teaching. As a result teachers are quite clear about the structure and purpose of RE, and are able to teach it with confidence and enthusiasm.
- Further stimulus to the leadership of the subject in the school has been the professional guidance and support received from the local authority. This has helped the school present RE within a coherent and clearly structured framework. Further support and guidance has come from the RE department in the local secondary school, so that the

sharing of ideas, subject expertise and resources helps to ensure that best practice is more widely disseminated.

- The action plan for the subject accurately identifies areas in which further development is sought, as well as the means, resources and timing for implementing changes.

Creative thinking in RE

Teachers and pupils show evidence of ways in which the use creative thinking is an integral part of the process of learning and teaching in RE. It is seen most clearly in the way in which pupils respond to questioning which has been thoroughly thought through beforehand by teachers who are able to help pupils probe and explore ideas in a progressive and developmental way.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing and refining assessment to help track pupils' progress in RE more closely
- extending the opportunities for pupils to encounter and learn from a wider range of people from different religious communities.

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

John Rudge
Additional Inspector