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Mr D Herrett
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Dear Mr Herrett

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 February 2009 to look at work in religious education (RE).

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

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils in RE are above average reflecting good achievement.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's standards are broadly in line with expectations for their age. Planning takes good account of the Nottinghamshire agreed syllabus requirements. Work aimed at achieving the early learning goal of knowledge and understanding of the world is planned and implemented well. Children have many opportunities to explore the nature of religious practices and teachings through exposure to a wide range of celebrations and festivals. They also have opportunities to be creative in their responses to such activities, for example by making cards, posters and foods associated with these customs and practices. Children were very excited about making pancakes in response to their work on Lent.

- At the end of Key Stage 1 standards are at least in line with the agreed syllabus expectations. Overall, pupils make good progress. The majority can identify features of the different religions they have studied. Pupils are developing the skill of asking questions about religious artefacts, stories and practices well. For example, Year 2 pupils were able to plan a simple investigation into the origin of the practice of fasting during the period of Lent.
- Progress across Key Stage 2 is also good. Pupils have a secure grasp of the beliefs and practices of religions they have studied and can readily describe some similarities and differences between religions. They are developing their use of the higher order skills of investigation, enquiry and interpretation in relation to religious material.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils' ability to explain and interpret features of religious belief and practice is above average. They can undertake independent enquiries into religion with confidence and ask challenging and pertinent questions about religious matters. Pupils also have a good understanding of the significance of religion in people's everyday lives and can debate some of the more controversial issues about religion in modern society, appreciating that religious convictions are often deeply felt. For example, pupils were able to give well-reasoned, respectful arguments regarding whether religious clothing should or should not be worn in school.
- RE makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and overall personal development. They find RE fascinating, greatly appreciating the time spent in exploring religious and cultural diversity. Aspects of RE are suitably linked to the school's implementation of the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' programme. All pupils are positive about subject, reporting that they enjoy the challenge required of them. A broad range of experiences develops pupils' understanding of themselves and their place in the wider world.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- A key strength of the teaching of RE is its consistency across the school. Lessons are planned rigorously to ensure the learning is carefully structured so that the needs of the wide range of ability in each class is addressed skilfully. Tasks cover a wide variety of learning styles allowing pupils to achieve well. All pupils know what they are going to learn because the teachers explain very clearly what they are going to do and what they will be able to understand by the end of the lesson.
- A further indication of the effective teaching is the sequencing of activities and management of learning to ensure pupils extract the most from stimulus material and consolidate their ideas before moving on. Of particular note is the emphasis placed on encouraging pupils to work together in groups and to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Pupils work well together. Many concentrate for sustained periods, engaging with each other in a mature and sensible manner. The discussion work of some in Year 6, who were examining the significance of fasting in three faiths, was of a good standard.

- Pupils often produce some impressive extended written work in RE. This tends to focus around 'learning from' religion and there is less independent written work related to work 'learning about' religion. This has the tendency to limit the attainment of some pupils, particularly the most able.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum is imaginative and thoughtful. The choice of religions studied is well planned and methodical. There is a good balance of work between the two attainment targets with good attention paid to the systematic development of pupils' knowledge and understanding of religion, particularly in the teaching of Christianity. There are excellent links with literacy which result in the effective development of pupils' critical thinking through well-conceived opportunities to build independent writing into RE.
- Very strong links are made with personal, social and health education and other curriculum areas. Theme weeks enhance the RE curriculum. These have served as valuable experiences for the pupils enabling them to explore different cultures to their own.
- Assessment opportunities are securely in place. The introduction 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 good.

- A pattern of high expectations, systematic teaching and effective leadership, has led to the subject being held in high regard across the school. The subject leader has a very clear understanding of the priorities for improvement based on good monitoring and evaluation of the provision. A well-focused improvement plan for the subject is in place with a set of clear and appropriate priorities targeted on improving provision and raising standards.
- The subject leader is highly focused on pupils' learning. She has established a very successful pattern of joint working with her colleagues.

Creative thinking in RE

RE lessons and other activities are delivered in a wide range of ways using ICT, art, drama and discussion. The enquiry style of teaching which is encouraging pupils to pose their own religious or moral questions is a good feature. However, these techniques are not fully embedded across the school. 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.

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.

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