

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

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



25 March 2009

Mr G Dow  
Headteacher  
Anchorsholme Primary School  
Eastpines Drive  
Thornton-Cleveleys  
Lancashire  
FY5 3RX

Dear Mr Dow

Ofsted 2008-9 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE).

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 25 February 2009 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 a 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 your self, the RE subject leader and other staff, discussions with pupils, 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

The achievement of pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- The standards reached in RE at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 are broadly in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus.
- Pupils in the Foundation Stage make a good start in RE and gain familiarity with a range of features of religion. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils can carry out simple investigations into religion. They know some of the questions which need to be asked when exploring stories and practices of religion. For example, in one lesson pupils explored aspects of

the story of Rama and Sita and showed some awareness of its place within the Hindu religion. More able pupils are able to write independently about their thoughts on religious ideas. Elsewhere, however, the progress made by the pupils is more limited particularly where too much use is made of worksheets in lessons.

- The pattern of the pupils' progress across Key Stage 2 is variable and satisfactory overall. Some good progress is made in talking about and identifying appropriate questions to ask when investigating key religious concepts. In one Year 5 lesson pupils showed good insight when exploring issues related to the idea of revelation. However, this pattern of good progress is not consistent. For example, the use made of enquiry and investigation is not always sufficiently challenging to ensure pupils develop their skills in exploring religion. Limited use is made of more extended independent writing in RE. Older pupils do not have enough opportunity to explore issues related to religion in the modern world.
- RE makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Learning often encourages them to relate some of the concepts of religion to their own lives. They have opportunities to use different forms of expression to communicate their reflections of their learning. RE promotes pupils' awareness of diversity and helps them understand the importance of respecting differences. Pupils enjoy RE and can see its relevance.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Relationships in RE lessons are good. Planning is thorough and teachers organise their classes carefully. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of a range of engaging tasks and resources to promote the pupils' enjoyment of, and interest in, RE. Some good use is made of questioning to challenge and extend pupils' thinking.
- The purpose of lessons is shared carefully with pupils and teachers seek to check whether they have understood and achieved those objectives. However, in practice, the structure of activities does not always ensure that the learning enables pupils to meet those objectives. On occasions, the connections between activities are not clear or the use of 'creative' activities distracts from the RE focus of the lesson. This is sometimes the result of over-structured planning which leaves limited opportunity for pupils to share their understanding or express their uncertainty about the purpose of their learning. In some classes there is too much reliance on the use of worksheets which narrow the quality of the learning.
- Work in RE is often marked carefully and good use is made of praise to encourage pupils. However, pupils are not always provided with a clear understanding of how to improve their work.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- A very detailed scheme is in place for RE based closely on the locally agreed syllabus. There is broad coverage of all six major religions with some revisiting of specific traditions to provide greater depth of study. Specific themes are used to structure each year's programme of work.
- Planning is based primarily on teaching RE in six units a year usually on a once-a-week basis. The effect of this tends to be to fragment learning and limit opportunities for more extended enquiries and stronger cross-curricular links with, for example, literacy. Very great care has been taken to provide teachers with detailed lesson by lesson planning. However, the planning is less clear about the key focus, concept or question driving each unit or about the ways in which each unit builds on prior learning. Some of the more task-driven learning results from these limitations in the curriculum planning.
- The school has begun to explore alternative models of curriculum delivery for RE. A unit on Sikhism in one year group has been blocked and linked to a wider study of India. The school is aware that it needs to monitor these innovations to evaluate their impact on pupils' achievements in the subject.
- The scheme of work re-visits the Christian tradition across both key stages. However, the continuity and progression in pupils' learning about the religion is not always clear enough.
- While there are some opportunities for pupils to meet with or visit representatives from religions in the local area, the school is aware that it needs to extend this provision.
- A good start has been made in establishing arrangements for assessing and recording pupils' progress in RE. A priority for the future is to ensure these arrangements are manageable and applied consistently across the school.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The subject is led by a very committed and highly experienced subject leader. She has been very diligent in implementing the locally agreed syllabus, in supporting her colleagues, and in maintaining links with local support networks. She works closely, for example, with the higher level teaching assistant who teaches RE to ensure she is supported appropriately. There is an extended policy for the subject showing a clear understanding of the importance and value of the subject.
- The subject leader has worked hard to secure a good resource base for the subject and encourage staff to make use of various electronic

resources to support their teaching. Displays about RE are evident throughout the school and maintain the subject's profile.

- The ability of the subject leader to monitor and evaluate the provision is constrained by a number of factors. She is part-time and the expectations in relation to her monitoring role are not clear. The processes and criteria to be applied in evaluating RE are also not clearly defined. As a result the regular subject reviews are not evaluative enough and the subject action plans are largely limited to issues related to the management and resourcing of the subject.
- While the subject leader has some access to professional development in the subject, RE has not been a focus of wider staff development in recent years.
- The curriculum arrangements for RE are partly determined by decisions about the way it is staffed. In a high proportion of classes RE is not taught by the class teacher but by a higher level teaching assistant or another teacher covering for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. The school is not monitoring this arrangement carefully enough to evaluate its impact on pupils' progress and the quality of the curriculum.

#### Creative thinking in RE

The school is committed to exploring more creative approaches to the teaching of RE. To date, it has been constrained by the pattern of its curriculum provision and by concerns about how far it can go in experimenting with innovative models of delivery. A start has been made in seeking new approaches to the delivery of the subject using more focused and blocked units of work. The school is aware of the need to monitor these developments carefully.

The subject leader has encouraged greater use of creative activities in RE such as music, role play and art. While many of these activities are engaging and imaginative, care needs to be taken to ensure that the focus is on encouraging pupils to think creatively about the subject and not simply using creative activities to present their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the pattern of the curriculum for RE to ensure it incorporates greater progression in pupils' learning and provides teachers with a clearer understanding of the central focus of each unit of work
- developing more opportunities for pupils to use creative thinking when undertaking investigations into religion and belief
- ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation of RE incorporate a clearer focus on pupils' progress and the quality of provision.

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