

12 February 2009

Mr I Rix
Headteacher
Ashley Junior School
Ashley Road
New Milton
BH25 5BP

Dear Mr Rix

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 11 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, a governor, the RE subject leader and other staff, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is good.

- The standards reached by pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly in line with and, in some regards, above the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. This represents good achievement overall by the pupils. The pupils develop a secure framework of concepts and understanding within which to place their investigation into the world of religion and human experience. By the end of the key stage they have a good knowledge of a wide range of aspects of religion. They are able to link their learning together showing a clear understanding of the significance which religions and beliefs play in human life.
- Pupils often use higher level skills of enquiry in the context of their work in RE. In Year 3, for example, they were able to evaluate the importance of places of worship and their significance for believers. In Year 6, pupils were able to explain

the meaning of Passover applying concepts such as tradition, memory and uniqueness with confidence.

- The school has recognised that the progress pupils make in RE is uneven across different year groups. In some classes, for example, there is a tendency to focus on pupils recording information about religion rather than investigating and exploring the key concepts of the subject. In these cases, the written work tends to be fairly limited in terms of challenge, but elsewhere pupils are engaged in higher level literacy tasks when, for example, expressing their ideas about God in Year 5.
- RE makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development. The wide range of learning strategies used in RE lessons support the development of a number of key personal learning skills including collaborative learning and speaking and listening. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging pupils to become more reflective about their learning and about important aspects of their personal experience. The pupils are enthusiastic about the subject and are developing a very positive respect for diversity and the lifestyle and views of others.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- The good progress pupils make in RE reflects the good teaching they receive in the subject. At its best, teachers' planning reflects a good understanding of the way pupils learn in RE. This is supported by the impressive curriculum documentation. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use well to ask challenging questions and organise interesting and well-managed tasks. Good use is made of strategies such as group activities, role play, paired work and 'hot seating' to ensure learning is both fun and purposeful.
- The good teaching is reflected in some high quality displays which use pupils' thoughts effectively to prompt new ideas. The teaching is supported well through the use of a wide range of engaging resource material. Teachers are willing to take risks and try out new ideas in RE. Marking in RE is good and, because most teachers are clear about what they hope the pupils will achieve, effective use is often made of a range of written and oral evidence to assess progress.
- Just occasionally, tasks are not quite challenging enough, particularly where the focus of a unit of work is lost and activities become too focused on gathering information rather than prompting enquiry.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good and in some respects outstanding.

- A very detailed and thorough scheme is in place for RE closely based on the locally agreed syllabus. This has ensured that all units of work incorporate a strong process of learning based on the Hampshire enquiry-based approach to RE. Planning incorporates a range of engaging activities to support the teachers in delivering the subject. The purpose of the learning and ways in which pupils' progress can be assessed are also carefully identified.
- A flexible approach has been adopted towards the way the subject is incorporated within the curriculum using a combination of different models of delivery depending on the nature of the area of enquiry. The effective RE

curriculum is enriched by a wide range of visits and visitors drawing from a range of local religious communities.

- The assessment and reporting arrangements in place for RE are straightforward, manageable and effective. These are usually, though not always, implemented well with teachers recording evidence of pupils' progress against carefully identified objectives.
- An important strength of the planning, supported by the excellent monitoring arrangements, is that the teachers are in a strong position to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. This has enabled them to recognise, for example, that pupils find some of the concepts which have been selected for study difficult to interpret and use. Where this happens, the structure of the learning is less secure.
- Monitoring has also revealed that the very detailed and, at times, quite intensive sequences of learning are not always easy to deliver. The RE subject leader is giving careful consideration to ways in which the planning might be adjusted to ensure the high quality of learning can be maintained within the time which can be realistically allocated to the subject. Focusing on 'quality rather than quantity' will also support the development of even stronger cross-curricular links particularly with literacy and promote clearer progression between individual units of work.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are outstanding.

- RE benefits from excellent subject leadership. The coordinator is highly committed and very experienced and brings a high level of subject expertise to her role. She makes very good use of the local authority's training and support networks to maintain this expertise. Good in-school professional development, again with the support of the local authority, has helped teachers to develop their understanding of RE and gain ownership of the challenging scheme of work. The RE co coordinator has also made presentations to the governors, some of whom have attended training in the subject.
- The high quality of the leadership in RE is reflected in the thorough schemes of work, the impressive resource base and the high profile the subject has in the school. The arrangements for monitoring RE are exemplary. They include excellent use of pupil interviews, thorough work sampling and development of annotated exemplification materials, and careful reviewing of the curriculum. The outcomes of monitoring are incorporated within insightful annual reviews of the subject. These effective arrangements underpin the outstanding capacity for further improvement of the subject.
- There is a clear RE policy in place although the school recognises it needs to note that while the locally agreed syllabus has a recommended time allocation for the subject this is not statutory.
- RE plays a key role in supporting the school's wider commitment to promoting the faith and cultural diversity dimensions of community cohesion and to the development of pupils as reflective learners.

Creative thinking in RE

Some very effective use is made of creative thinking in the context of RE. Pupils are often involved in using critical thinking skills which require them to investigate and engage creatively with a range of concepts and ideas. The structure of the planning in RE provides a strong basis for this by focusing on key skills such as evaluation, reflection and application. Good use is made of creative activities enabling pupils to offer their own personal responses to their learning. On occasions, some of the literacy-based tasks are less challenging and creative and there is scope to expand the range of writing in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using the outcomes of monitoring to review:
 - the selection and sequencing of key concepts in the planning
 - the potential for using key questions to help focus the learning
 - whether the number of, or detail in, the units need to be reduced to secure quality
- increasing opportunities for more independent extended writing in RE.

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