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Mr P Daniels  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Daniels

### Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 January 2009 to look at work in religious education (RE). On a personal note I would like to thank you all for your assistance in making areas of the school so accessible.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE, the visit had a particular focus on the promotion of community cohesion 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 good.

#### Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is good.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 meet the expectations of the agreed syllabus. Year 2 pupils can, for example, use religious words and phrases to identify features of Christian baptism, including its symbols and actions, and to explain why the celebration is important for Christians.
- Most pupils in Year 6 demonstrate attainment which is in line with or above the expectations of the agreed syllabus reflecting good progress.

In particular, they understand that religion has an impact not only on people's lives but also on the wider society. For example, they were able to talk about the way some people think Barack Obama fulfilled the prophecy of Martin Luther King. Pupils demonstrate their attainment better orally than in writing.

- The school has worked particularly hard to improve pupils' progress in relation to 'learning from' religion. This has been generally successful except that sometimes work is not connected carefully enough to their 'learning about' religion.
- All groups of pupils make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very well and there is a good level of challenge to engage those of higher abilities.
- The contribution RE makes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They enjoy RE and in both lessons observed were engrossed by their learning. They develop sensitivity to people who hold different opinions, and older pupils show considerable maturity in appreciating the impact of religious events and leaders on world affairs.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- RE teaching across the school is generally effective and consequently pupils make good progress in lessons and over time. Pupils enjoy RE lessons and show a real interest and enthusiasm for the tasks teachers set for them.
- Most teachers have good subject knowledge. Lesson planning is very good and based clearly on the principles of the new Plymouth agreed syllabus. Teachers maintain the practice of evaluating their teaching. They annotate planning with indicators of what went well and what needs changing for next time. This is an effective practice with the potential to support the full implementation of the new agreed syllabus.
- Teachers use a wide range of interesting teaching styles which include encouraging pupils to learn independently and from each other. In Year 6 for example, group work is very well managed and pupils take active responsibility for their learning. Work is usually carefully adapted to the needs of different abilities.
- Assessment is good and based on a sound understanding of the level descriptions in the agreed syllabus, although occasionally there is insufficient differentiated work for older pupils to extend them to meet some of the distinctive requirements of the higher levels. The recording and tracking of pupils' progress is excellent.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- With very few exceptions, individual teachers have familiarised themselves with the agreed syllabus and have taken great care in planning individual units for their classes, with the result that the curriculum experienced by pupils is good. While individual units of work are well-planned, the wider pattern of continuity and progression across the long and medium term planning for RE is underdeveloped.
- Most pupils enjoy RE because they find it interesting. The curriculum challenges them academically and also contributes to their personal development.
- Very good links are made with information and communication technology and oracy. RE is used as a particularly powerful vehicle for developing speaking and listening, which was a point for action from a previous inspection.
- The curriculum is designed by teachers to provide opportunities for all learners to progress and develop well.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The leadership of the school is successfully focused on raising standards and achievement in RE while also promoting the pupils' personal development. Teachers respond well to the expectation that they will teach RE effectively. An asset is the deployment of one teacher to teach RE to three classes across the two key stages promoting continuity in pupils' learning.
- Following local authority training, teachers have been well briefed on the key elements of the new agreed syllabus, which they understand well. As a result, its principles are being implemented effectively in classroom teaching. The school has strong links with the local inter-faith centre and this has proved helpful to curriculum planning and acquiring resources.
- There has been considerable monitoring of RE lessons across the school. However, the evaluations of the provision vary in quality. Some suggestions for improvement are too generic providing limited guidance on the subject specific aspects of learning.
- Long and medium term planning are underdeveloped. A plan to translate the agreed syllabus into a fully comprehensive scheme of work has yet to be established.

## Community Cohesion

Pupils demonstrate a lively interest in exploring issues related to, and good awareness and understanding about, diversity in religion. The curriculum provides good opportunities to explore religion in the contemporary world at local, national and global level. Through their study of Christianity and other religions, pupils have good opportunities to explore the way religion might have helped shape their own or other people's sense of identity. Pupils have many challenging opportunities to express their own views about religious and moral issues. They listen to each other respectfully and know that their opinions are valued. They also have good opportunities to ask questions about and discuss religious issues which arise through, for example, the news or other media. As a result some of them have an advanced capacity to relate religious issues to wider events past and present.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enabling pupils to make stronger connections between their 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion.
- ensuring the most able pupils are suitably challenged and extending the opportunities for more extended writing in RE
- improving the overall subject leadership of RE.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop religious education 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

Barbara Wintersgill  
Additional Inspector