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Mr A Pridmore  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Pridmore

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 June 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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

- The pattern of achievement, while satisfactory overall, is uneven across the school largely because of limitations in the current curriculum. While there are examples of pupils progressing well in RE, this is not yet consistent enough to secure good achievement overall. Pupils do not always have enough opportunity to explore key concepts and investigate connections between different features of religion. There are limited opportunities for pupils to explore their own ideas about key religious beliefs.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's standards are broadly in line with expectations for their age. Work aimed at achieving the RE dimension of 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 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.
- From an early age children learn that religion is diverse and, by the end of Year 2, they have recognised the importance of respecting the views of others. Most pupils are able to recognise some religious symbols and words, and some are beginning to discuss the meaning of religious symbols, language and stories.
- The pattern of the pupils' progress across Key Stage 2 is variable and satisfactory overall. Pupils have a sound understanding of the beliefs and practices of religions they have studied and can sometimes describe some similarities and differences between religions. Some good progress is made in talking about and identifying appropriate questions to ask when investigating key religious concepts. 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 on 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 satisfactory.

- Teaching is characterised by warm relationships with pupils. Lessons are well planned. Teachers research the topics well and often present information accurately and carefully. Information and communication technology and interactive whiteboards are used effectively to enhance their learning. Stimulating RE displays are prominent in classrooms.
- While the best teaching secures good sustained learning which is based on clear objectives, occasionally these features are less evident. When this occurs, learning is less challenging and activities are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils. In some cases, teachers are not secure in their understanding of the subject and are over-reliant on the local authority's published scheme of work to guide their planning.
- While much of the learning in RE is well-organised and enjoyable, the range of skills pupils use in investigating religion and belief and in organising their

thinking are sometimes quite limited. Some of the tasks are not challenging enough to extend the skills of older, more able pupils.

- The progress made by pupils in the lessons observed was broadly satisfactory. Pupils are sometimes slightly too passive and do not always engage actively enough in the learning. The structure and sequencing of learning is not always secure and the links between activities are not made entirely clear to the pupils.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The choice of religions selected for study reflects the nature of the local community. A major strength of the curriculum is the good provision of a wide range of enrichment activities building on the school's links in the local community. Very good use is made of the expertise of parents and representatives of local religious groups to extend the pupils' learning.
- However, a number of factors restrict the effectiveness of the curriculum. Some of the planning, although based closely on the agreed syllabus, does not provide an effective integration of the two attainment targets and does not sequence units of work appropriately. Consequently, the planning is not providing teachers with a clear enough model of ways of organising the pupils' learning and this leads to the loss of focus and structure in some lessons. While careful attention is paid to matching the curriculum to the interests of the pupils, insufficient attention is paid in the planning to the progressive development of the skills of the subject. The school is awaiting the publication of a new locally agreed syllabus and will use this opportunity to update the long term planning for the RE curriculum.
- Assessment opportunities are developing. 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 ongoing assessment.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- You have a clear understanding of the priorities for improvement based on good monitoring and evaluation of the provision.
- Progress has been made in establishing a model for assessment. The arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are satisfactory. 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. Crucially, the leadership is committed to ensuring that improvements in RE are integrated within the school's wider priorities for improving learning.

- The school has found it difficult to access good quality continuing professional development in RE.

### Creative thinking in RE

The use made of creative thinking in RE is generally satisfactory. Some links are forged with more creative areas of the curriculum, including drama and art, to support learning in RE. However, on occasions, weaknesses in planning mean the creative thinking or activity does not relate to clear and well-defined subject learning objectives. Some of the written tasks do not challenge pupils enough or encourage them to handle information in creative ways. Currently RE is delivered on a relatively standard weekly basis in half-term units. Consideration is now being given to developing a more flexible and imaginative approach to support a more creative approach to the teaching of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing more training opportunities to help staff develop their understanding of how to plan and teach the key concepts and skills which underpin effective RE
- using the opportunity provided by the new locally agreed syllabus to develop an RE curriculum which secures greater progression and challenge in pupils' learning.

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