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Mr R Hawkins
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Dear Mr Hawkins

Ofsted 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 09 July 2009 to look at work in RE. I greatly appreciated the trouble you had all taken to ensure that my visit should be productive and enjoyable.

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 staff, discussions with pupils, 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 achievement of pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- By the time children move into Year 1 from Reception, most have developed the confidence and the basic skills needed to describe major events in the Christian calendar at a simple level. They have also built up a repertoire of narratives from the Old Testament, such as the story of Noah's Ark. While most are able to retell these stories, with some

prompting, few show a spirit of enquiry or respond to the stories imaginatively.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are below average but represent satisfactory achievement given pupils' starting points. Pupils build up a reasonable knowledge of ceremonies and festivals in the religions studied. They do not, however, explore links between these festivals and their own experience at anything more than an anecdotal level. The question, 'Why?' is not posed often enough to promote higher order thinking. Reading and writing levels are below national averages and this limits pupils' development as independent learners in RE.
- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils know about major world faiths and, with prompting, make constructive links across to their own experience. They can give an account of the Christian narrative and recognise the importance of Christmas and Easter but struggle with terms such as 'resurrection'.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.
- Pupils are receptive and earnest, willing to discuss their beliefs and to listen to others. There is a widely shared interest in Christianity, encouraged by the school's strong links with local churches and Christian-based organisations.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory overall.

- There is a good rapport between teachers and pupils. Teachers demonstrate sound subject knowledge and frequent praise maintains pupils' confidence. The effectiveness of teaching and learning in RE is, however, uneven.
- Some use is made of the local authority models for RE schemes of work and classroom activities. These include guidance on how to challenge children of all abilities and on assessment. However, these models have not yet had a consistent impact on teaching and learning.
- In the best lessons, open questions and varied activities encourage pupils to develop their ideas beyond simple narrative and to make thoughtful links to their own experience. Teachers use interactive whiteboards confidently and pupils enjoy opportunities to gather information from the internet, although their scope for individual enquiry is limited. Pupils progress less well where the pace is slow and opportunities for independent learning are limited.
- Lesson planning for RE does not ensure that pupils develop their investigative skills in a sequential way. While lesson plans indicate a thread linking the various activities, pupils are not always clear what it is, so move from one task to another without understanding the connections between them.
- There is little evidence of peer or self review by pupils. Marking of written work is variable, with little guidance on how pupils can do better.

- Lively and informative displays about world faiths, both in classrooms and around the school, reinforce the work done in lessons.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision for RE meets statutory requirements and follows the locally agreed syllabus carefully. The school is aware that more needs to be done to support challenge and progression in pupils' learning. Individual units do not always ensure that a clear line of enquiry runs through the work linking the two key aspects: 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion.
- Their spiritual development is well supported through assemblies, which have a strongly Christian focus. There are regular contributions from local churches and from the chair of governors. The after-school 'Jesus, mess and biscuits' club is very well attended.
- Opportunities for pupils to visit local places of worship are limited, especially to non-Christian centres, but visits to a village parish church have clearly enhanced pupils' interest in, and understanding of, Christian traditions.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- Green Park has grown from the recent amalgamation of two neighbouring schools. Sound foundations for RE have been laid. The locally agreed syllabus has been adapted to fit the school's combined-year classes and schemes of work cover the key elements.
- There has been no systematic monitoring of RE teaching and, as the school recognises, more needs to be done to ensure that assessment actively promotes good learning.
- RE resources are excellent, particularly the attractively presented and accessible stock of child-friendly books on Christianity and other world faiths.
- The school is aware of the need to extend pupils' understanding of Britain as a multi-faith community. Recently, links have been established with two universities to arrange visits from representatives of major world faiths.

Creative thinking in RE

The scope for, and level of, creative thinking in RE are currently limited with few opportunities for pupils to develop as independent learners and creative thinkers. Pupils enjoy RE but find it less challenging than other subjects. The style and content of written work indicate that pupils rely on specific guidelines for each task, which does not encourage creative thinking. They are keen to say and do what is expected of them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising expectations and extending opportunities for independent learning to prompt more creative and critical thinking in RE
- developing further forms of assessment that accelerate pupils' progress, through feedback in lessons, the marking of RE written work, and peer and self assessment by pupils
- monitoring teaching and learning systematically to ensure that pupils of all abilities are appropriately challenged.

I 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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector