

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



16 July 2009

Ms S Tomlinson
Headteacher
Wheelock Primary School
Crewe Rd
Wheelock
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 3RT

Dear Ms Tomlinson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and help, and that of your staff and children, during my visit on 9 July 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 pupils, an assembly, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good with strong capacity for yet further improvement.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is good.

- By the end of Key Stage 1 the standards reached by the pupils in RE are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. By the end of Key Stage 2 standards often exceed expectations. This represents good progress overall by the pupils.
- By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils know about some key features of the Christian and Jewish religions. They can, for example, recall biblical stories and talk about the reasons why the Sabbath is important for a Jewish family. They can also link their own feelings and experiences related to religious material and ideas such as 'specialness'. Their appreciation of the diversity of religion within their local area and in the UK is less well-

developed and the use they can make of a range of religious vocabulary is quite modest.

- Pupils make particularly good progress in RE at Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 6 they have a broad knowledge of the religions studied: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. They can make comparisons between the faiths and show a high level of understanding of the significance and meaning which religion has in people's lives. They can identify challenging questions about religion and use higher order skills such as interpretation, investigation and evaluation effectively in the context of the subject. In one lesson in Year 5, pupils demonstrated very good understanding of the meaning and importance which places of worship have for religious believers and were able to evaluate their significance.
- While progress overall is good there is evidence that it is not even across all year groups or all units of work. The school's careful analysis of evidence about standards indicates that girls generally do better than boys in the assessment tasks. However, evidence from lessons indicates that the tasks may under-estimate the achievement of some boys.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is also good. They usually enjoy the subject and are keen to participate in the learning. The subject makes a significant contribution to their awareness of diversity. Pupils in Year 6 spoke powerfully about the way their recent work with Muslim pupils from Levenshulme had enriched their understanding of Islam countering some of the stereotypes they had gained from the media. Strong links are forged with the school's SEAL programme and this ensures that pupils have good opportunities to explore feeling and ideas in the context of RE. Some year 6 pupils expressed the view that they would value even more opportunities to discuss and debate religious issues and questions about the meaning and purpose of life.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good with outstanding features.

- Both lessons observed were of at least good quality and in one case was outstanding. The subject knowledge of the teachers was good and the activities very well-organised and pacy. Effective use was made of pair and group activities to maintain interest and encourage active involvement in the learning. Teachers used questioning well to prompt thinking and check pupils' understanding. The support provided by the teaching assistants was also good.
- A wide range of different learning activities is deployed in RE including mind-mapping, role play, drama, fieldwork and art as well as opportunities for more extended writing. Pupils in reception had developed a quiet space in the outdoor play area as part of their exploration of special places. At its best, teaching enables pupils to take responsibility for their learning developing their own ideas and lines of investigation. The Year 5 lesson observed was a model of effective enquiry-based learning.
- This high quality is evident in the work of many classes but is not fully consistent in all the activities which are recorded in the pupils' books. Very occasionally tasks are not as challenging and there is over-reliance on

rather narrow worksheet activities. When this is the case pupils are less engaged by the subject.

- While the links between the two areas of attainment, learning 'about and from' religion and human experience, are often carefully built into the sequence of activities, this is not always the case and, as a result, the focus of learning on RE-related objectives is sometimes unclear.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The provision for RE meets statutory requirements and is closely matched to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Extensive use is made of the schemes of work produced by the local authority. As a result, the curriculum is well-balanced and covers the required areas of study. Teachers adapt and annotate the schemes of work as appropriate making adjustments to match the pupils' needs. While this model of planning provides a clear structure for the teachers, on occasions it is leading to slightly fragmented and narrow patterns of learning.
- More recently the school has begun to explore other patterns of delivery for RE using their own planning with considerable success. This more innovative work has enabled the school to develop stronger cross-curricular links, more sustained enquiry-based learning and more opportunities for pupils to play an active role in developing their own ideas and ways of working. As a result the level of challenge and the standard of the pupils' work have improved.
- Well-considered assessments arrangements have been established building on advice from the local authority. These are being implemented well and are yielding helpful information about the performance of the pupils. Effective use has been made of the assessment evidence to adapt the planning to help address the weaker achievement of boys; as a result, their progress has improved.
- There is a strong pattern of enrichment activities to support learning in RE. A twinning arrangement with a school in Levenshulme with a high proportion of Muslim pupils has promoted a very positive opportunity to develop work on Islam. Good use is also made of contacts with the Christian and Jewish communities in the local area.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good with some outstanding features.

- The newly appointed RE subject co-ordinator has quickly established her role and is providing good leadership for the subject. She benefits from strong support from the senior leadership team and from the very active involvement of the RE link governor in the development and review of the subject. Good use has been made of training opportunities and the support available from the local authority.
- There are strong arrangements in place to review the provision for RE. A clear set of priorities for improvement has been established linked to a

robust pattern of action planning and well-targeted monitoring. A strength of the process is the very clear focus on raising standards and improving the quality of pupils' learning.

- The teachers are well-supported through the clear scheme of work, the informal discussions and guidance of the subject leader and the recent staff training on assessment in RE.
- A strength of the leadership is the effective support and monitoring of the work of the teaching assistants who are delivering RE in three of the classes. They are enthusiastic to teach the subject and work closely with the teachers in preparing lessons. The impact of their involvement is being carefully monitored and thought is being given to ensuring their use, covering planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, does not limit the scope for innovation in the way the subject is delivered.
- Good progress has been made in developing assessment arrangements for the subject. These, together with the opportunities to interview pupils about their experience of RE, have been the focus of the sharply focused monitoring arrangements in the current year. It has been recognised that the nature of the assessments is in danger of narrowing the range of evidence which is gathered about the pupils' progress in RE and there are plans to develop these arrangements further to address this. There are also plans to extend the monitoring more widely next year to include more classroom observation.
- A particular strength of the subject leadership is the careful monitoring of the curriculum. It has been recognised that, while the use of the local authority scheme of work has provided a good structure for developing the subject, the wider introduction of more innovative thinking about the curriculum is providing opportunities to raise the quality of RE further. In some classes new models of more blocked, integrated and enquiry-based RE have been introduced, moving beyond the local authority guidance, and these have been carefully monitored to evaluate their impact on pupils' learning which have been positive.

Creative thinking in RE

There are many good examples of the effective use of creative thinking in RE both in relation to the pupils' learning and the development of more innovative patterns of curriculum delivery. The school has made 'creativity' a focus for development and, as a result, there is a good understanding of the importance of developing the use of more critical thinking in RE. For example, in the Year 5 lesson observed the pattern of tasks was designed to challenge pupils to make connections between ideas, think things through for themselves, and work out solutions to challenging situations. In the Year 2 lesson, good use was made of a drama strategy to enable pupils to explore their response to the idea of forgiveness in the story of Joseph. The exploration of more creative ways of delivering RE is a response to the drive to develop more scope to link the subject to the wider curriculum and build in more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring further ways of developing the RE curriculum to provide greater challenge, more opportunities for sustained enquiry-based learning and more cross-curricular links
- reviewing the assessment arrangements to ensure they capture the full range of pupils' achievement in the subject.

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

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector