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1 October 2009

Mr D Simpson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Simpson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 September 2009, to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which pupils are becoming effective learners in the subject.

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 pupils and teachers; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Pupils' achievement in RE is good.

- Standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. By the end of Key Stage 2, standards are either in line or, in some cases, above those expectations.
- Key Stage 1 pupils are able to reflect on their learning and offer their own thoughts about aspects of religion and have an understanding of the meanings behind religious stories.

- While there is some variability in the progress pupils make in RE across Key Stage 2, overall achievement is good. Older pupils are becoming more adept in their use of higher order skills of investigation, enquiry and interpretation in relation to religious material. Some pupils are able to develop lines of enquiry and undertake independent research into some of aspects of religion. For example, pupils in Year 6 identified key questions to focus their learning about Islam, while undertaking some independent research into aspects of the religion. Where pupils' progress is more modest, activities tend to focus on gathering information about religion rather than investigating questions that are more challenging, or exploring their own ideas about religion.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is good. Pupils enjoy RE and, in both lessons observed, were engrossed in their learning. They develop sensitivity towards people who hold other opinions and older pupils show increasing maturity in appreciating the impact of religious practices on people's everyday lives.

### Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with good features.

- Lessons are generally planned well and activities are managed carefully. Effective use is made of questioning and discussion to check on pupils' progress and promote their learning. Teachers have a sound grasp of the subject and, as a result, learning objectives and tasks are explained carefully. Pupils work well together. Many concentrate for sustained periods, engaging in group work in a mature and sensible manner.
- 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. The subject leader has identified the need to review the way level expectations are defined, in order to make these more straightforward, reliable and relevant to the learning.
- Stimulating RE displays are prominent in classrooms. Effective use is made of a range of different types of activity, including research work, mind-mapping and group work to engage and interest pupils in their learning. At its best, teaching involves the use of higher order skills to challenge and extend pupils' learning.

### Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- A comprehensive and fully documented scheme of work has been developed which is matched closely to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The school is exploring different models of curriculum delivery for RE, including blocking work to provide more sustained sequences of learning.

- While careful attention is paid to matching the curriculum to the pupils' interests, insufficient attention is paid to planning the progressive development of the skills of the subject. The school is awaiting the review of the locally agreed syllabus and will use this opportunity to update the long-term planning for the RE curriculum.
- The planning for RE incorporates good opportunities to promote pupils' literacy skills. A range of enrichment activities and links to other aspects of school life are in place, although these do not, as yet, extend to making links with local non-Christian traditions.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory with some good features.

- There is a clear commitment to improvement and to ensuring statutory requirements are met. An effective subject evaluation was produced to support the preparation for this visit with an accurate evaluation of the subject's current position within the school. As a result the subject leader has a broad view of the quality of the provision and a more rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum has been identified which will be introduced later this year.
- The school is aware that it needs to consider whether the pattern of units and the content in the scheme of work are appropriately matched to pupils' needs and secures effective continuity and progression in their learning.
- A subject development plan is in place although, at present, this does not focus explicitly on raising pupils' achievement in the subject.
- Staff development has been limited because the school has found it difficult to gain access to good quality opportunities in RE.

#### The extent to which pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

As yet, thinking and learning skills are not systematically embedded in the school's long-term and medium-term planning. Pupils are sometimes encouraged to identify their own questions and develop their own lines of enquiry into religion. In addition, they are encouraged to use more creative activities to explore and express their responses to religion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the pattern of the curriculum for RE, to ensure that it incorporates greater progression in pupils' learning and provides teachers with a clearer understanding of the central focus of each unit of work
- increasing the opportunities for pupils to engage first hand with a range of religious communities
- 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.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
Her Majesty's Inspector