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Dear Mr Schofield

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils during my visit, on 12 October 2009, to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the 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 staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of three lessons; and attendance at an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with a number of good features. The capacity for improvement in the subject is good.

Achievement in RE

The achievement of pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- The attainment of the pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 is broadly in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. While pupils have a good general understanding of the importance of religion in some people's lives, their knowledge of different faiths is relatively limited.

- Similarly, by the end of Key Stage 2 the pupils' attainment is broadly average. It is, however, quite variable and some aspects of their learning are above average. For example, during the inspection pupils demonstrated good understanding when suggesting meanings for aspects of Jesus' teaching and explaining the significance of the Gurdwara in the life of the Sikh community. Overall, however, the development of their use of more demanding skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation is limited.
- The contribution of RE to pupils' broader personal development is impressive. They are positive about exploring different peoples' beliefs and show a genuine curiosity about religion. They are also clear that RE provides a very good opportunity to develop their respect for diversity.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory with a number of good features.

- Lessons are carefully planned and very orderly. Teachers manage pupils and tasks well ensuring that they use a variety of activities and resources, including ICT, to engage pupils' interest.
- Teachers have reasonable subject knowledge, although on occasions their ability to structure the learning to ensure that the pupils make good progress is insecure. Sometimes the learning lacks challenge and is too controlled by the teacher restricting the opportunities for pupils to exercise independence and get more involved in their learning.
- While teachers share the learning objectives they do not always provide pupils with a clear understanding of the wider context and direction of their learning.
- Some good use is made of questioning to prompt discussion and check the pupils' progress, but this does not always lead to appropriate adjustments in the pattern of their subsequent learning.
- Work is marked carefully and increasing use is being made of the national levels to help monitor the pupils' progress. Some effective use is made of peer assessment to involve them more actively in their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory but requires improvement to help raise attainment.

- The school has found it difficult to plan effectively on the basis of the locally agreed syllabus. It has used both the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's materials and, more recently, a commercially available scheme of work to provide a basis for the RE curriculum. While these have provided structure and order, they have narrowed teachers' independence and the quality of learning.

- The continuity and progression within and between units of work are of variable quality. While good use is made of blocked units to ensure more sustained progress and cross-curricular links, some units are too short or too fragmented to secure high quality learning.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is appropriately focused on the Muslim and Christian traditions reflecting the background of the pupils, but not all the individual units are pitched at an appropriate level relative to the prior learning and needs of the pupils.
- Some strong links are made to literacy with opportunities for pupils to use a range of different genre to record their learning including, for example, diary and instructional writing. However, overall, insufficient attention is paid to the systematic, progressive development of pupils' higher order learning skills.
- Some good use is made of links with the local community to enrich pupils' learning and there are plans to extend this further.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management of RE is good.

- The newly appointed RE leader brings vision and energy to the subject. She is well supported within the school. There is a clear commitment to improvement recognising the potential within the subject to make a strong contribution to pupils' well-being and the promotion of community cohesion.
- Effective arrangements are in place to monitor the subject, although these have yet to have a full impact. The recent review and self-evaluation of RE were effective in identifying priorities for improvement. A detailed development plan is in place. A particular and significant strength has been the way the school has involved parents and pupils in the review of the subject.
- The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and incorporates appropriate provision in the early years/foundation stage.
- Although opportunities for staff professional development in RE have been limited in recent years, a careful audit has been undertaken to identify the training needs and these are reflected in the development plan.

How far pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

RE is beginning to make an important contribution to the development of pupils' skills as effective learners but this has yet to be embedded consistently and progressively across the curriculum. While some good use is made of higher order skills of learning in RE there is scope to extend this further. A clear pattern of enquiry-based learning has yet to be incorporated systematically across the RE provision. As a result, pupils are not always involved enough in the planning and review of their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the RE curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils effectively and maximises their learning
- extending opportunities for pupils to use a range of more challenging enquiry skills in their 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector