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Dear Ms La Porta

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 February 2010 to look at work in RE.

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

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, a governor and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of an assembly and lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with good features and a good capacity for improvement.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory with a number of good features.

- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage show a lively interest in a range of features of different religions and cultures. During the visit, some were able to talk about Chinese New Year and the forthcoming Pancake Day. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have made good progress in developing their ability to explain the meaning and significance of some key features of Christianity; for example, when in Year 2 they were able to offer some

good ideas about the meaning behind a range of Jesus' parables. Some of the higher attaining pupils were particularly adept at interpreting the ideas behind the Sower story. However, the pupils have a limited knowledge and understanding of any religion outside Christianity.

- The achievement of pupils across Key Stage 2 is also satisfactory but there are also clear examples of good progress. The strength of the pupils' learning is their understanding of the significance which religion plays in people's lives. Pupils quickly acquire a good knowledge of different religions. In Years 3 and 4, for example, they were able to compare and contrast different Jewish festivals and investigate the meaning of names within the Muslim tradition. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 extend their understanding of different religions. They exercise greater independence in carrying out enquiries and are able to ask some perceptive questions. Their achievement is slightly more limited in using a full range of higher order skills of enquiry and developing their understanding of the more significant concepts which underpin the study of religion. For example, the range of writing in RE is largely restricted to recount and descriptive work.
- Pupils of all abilities make similar progress. Those with a hearing impediment are supported particularly well in class and the more able are often provided with a good level of challenge.
- The subject makes a very strong contribution to pupils' personal development. There is an emphasis throughout on encouraging the attitudes of respect for diversity. Pupils have good opportunities to value and reflect on their own and others' experience. They enjoy RE.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is good.

- Lessons in RE are planned in detail. Teachers research the topics well and provide a good range of activities and resources to engage and stimulate pupils' interest. There is a good pace to learning and pupils respond well to the opportunities to ask questions and share their ideas.
- Learning is structured well to ensure pupils can build their knowledge and understanding. Careful attention is paid to ensuring work is matched to the different abilities of the pupils and in-class support is used very effectively. There are good examples of group and independent activities which are managed skilfully.
- On occasions, the pattern of work does not entirely succeed where pupils are asked to handle ideas which are too complex or for which they do not have enough background knowledge. The opportunities for pupils to take an active role in planning their work can also be rather restricted.
- The school is developing a systematic but straightforward approach to assessment and has identified this is a priority in their current RE action plan. Until very recently, the assessment arrangements in RE were not secure or reliable.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school follows the exemplar local authority scheme of work closely and meets the statutory requirements for RE. The medium-term planning is detailed and has successfully provided teachers with the confidence to develop their teaching. The school is beginning to explore more innovative approaches to the delivery of RE and making links to other areas of the curriculum.
- Currently, the RE curriculum tends to isolate the subject from other aspects of pupils' learning. The school has recognised that the pattern of weekly delivery of half-termly units can limit the scope for more sustained enquiry-based learning. The overarching key questions or concepts of each unit of work are not always entirely clear.
- The school has developed links with the local churches to enrich the pupils' learning but has few links with non-Christian groups.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE is led well and receives good support from both the senior leadership team and governors. There is a clear vision for the future development of the subject and a very good capacity for further improvement.
- The process of reviewing RE is now securely established. The time available for monitoring is used effectively. The recent mid-year review provided a sharply focused set of evaluations identifying well-judged priorities for improvement. The action plan is detailed and well-structured.
- Teachers plan effectively in teams and, where a higher level teaching assistant is used to deliver the subject, the arrangement is well-supported. The subject leader has had recent professional development and has used the available support from the local authority effectively.
- RE benefits from the school's strong emphasis on inclusion. The hearing impaired pupils are supported well in RE lessons and great care is taken to ensure the wishes of parents of children with a Jehovah's Witness background are given appropriate respect.
- While the subject makes a positive contribution to community cohesion within the school, the links with a diverse range of religious and belief communities in the area are limited and the opportunities for pupils to explore pressing issues related to religion in the modern world are sometimes underdeveloped.

Subject issue: how well pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

RE makes a positive contribution to the development of pupils' learning. There are good examples of pupils asking and exploring challenging questions and using a range of different skills in RE. For example, during the visit, pupils

engaged in speculating about, and reflecting on, the significance of religious practices; they were comparing and contrasting features of different celebrations; and, they engaged in some research tasks and well-structured group activities. The school recognises there is scope to extend the range of writing in RE and develop more opportunities for pupils to plan their own learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the curriculum to extend the opportunities for more sustained enquiry-based learning and stronger cross-curricular links
- embedding the newly introduced assessment arrangements to provide a more reliable picture of the progress the pupils are making in RE
- providing more links with a wider range of local religious and belief communities.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As I explained previously, 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