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Ms C Ireland
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Ireland

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 3 March 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, pupils, and a group of governors and representatives from the local community; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four 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.

- The attainment of pupils in RE at the end of Year 6 is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The pattern of this attainment is variable. Some pupils, particularly those who are actively involved in a faith, usually but not exclusively Islam, attain well and demonstrate a good knowledge of different features of religion and a clear

understanding of the place of religion in people's lives. They can talk with confidence about their own faith and that of others. Other pupils, while they make satisfactory progress overall, are less adept in terms of their subject knowledge and their ability to use more challenging skills when enquiring into religion. A key factor affecting progress is the somewhat fragmented pattern of the RE curriculum and the variable quality of the opportunities to extend the most able. The opportunities, for example, for more sustained independent investigations and writing are quite limited.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils develop a familiarity with a range of features of religion. By the end of Key Stage 1, the more able can explain these features with confidence and talk about why they are important. By the end of Key Stage 2, many pupils are asking sensible and challenging questions about religion. A strength of the provision throughout the school is the recognition of similarities and differences between religions.
- Pupils enjoy RE. It is effective in supporting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In particular, RE makes a very important contribution to their understanding of, and respect for, diversity – a priority for the school. A few older pupils expressed a concern that there was limited opportunity to discuss some of the more controversial issues arising from the work, such as questions about the existence of God.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Lessons in RE are planned carefully and managed effectively. Teachers use a range of resources and teaching approaches well to stimulate and maintain interest. There are some good opportunities for group work, individual research, discussion and asking questions. The importance of valuing the views of others is strongly modelled in lessons.
- Some teachers vary the tasks and use in-class support well to ensure the range of pupils' needs are met, but this practice is not consistent and there are some missed opportunities to extend the most able.
- The objectives of lessons are clear and explained well to pupils. What is often less clear is the wider purpose and direction of the work. As a result, sometimes the learning is narrowed and pupils, particularly the more able, cannot connect and extend their ideas as well as they might.
- A manageable assessment system is in place for recording progress. The quality of marking is, however, variable and little use is made of levels in the agreed syllabus to help pitch assessment judgements.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE curriculum follows the exemplar local authority scheme of work closely and meets the statutory requirements. However, the pattern of

delivery of RE and the teachers' grasp of the underlying purpose of some of the units of work are not always effective. These are key factors limiting the impact of the otherwise good teaching on pupils' progress.

- The delivery of the subject, usually in short half-termly units taught on a weekly basis, is fragmenting learning and limiting the scope for more sustained work linking to other areas of the curriculum. For example, the scope for RE to contribute to literacy development is often missed.
- Use is made of a variety of published schemes of work. These are providing teachers with a structure but, sometimes, insufficient attention is paid to the overarching purpose of the units. As a result, for example, pupils are not always clear about the key questions that are driving the learning and they miss opportunities to use higher order skills of enquiry.
- A major strength of the provision is the opportunity to enrich pupils' learning through links with the local community. During the inspection, an outstanding example was observed when a Muslim imam and a Catholic priest from the local community came together to talk about their respective faiths with the Year 6 pupils. The occasion was handled with great good humour and insight, modelling community cohesion for the pupils.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE benefits from experienced and very committed subject leadership and receives good support from both the senior leaders and the governors. This has ensured that the subject is secure within the curriculum and resources are used well to enhance the learning. The subject leader provides good informal support and guidance for colleagues.
- RE strongly affirms the underlying values of the school with its strong focus on inclusion, equality and the promotion of community cohesion. It has provided important opportunities for parents and the wider community to engage in the life of the school and be involved actively in the celebration of diversity.
- The arrangements for monitoring RE are currently fairly informal; the analysis of areas for development in RE is limited and not fully incorporated within a pattern of action planning. However, the subject will come into focus for a more effective review in 2010/11.
- Use is made of the local network group for RE to ensure the subject leadership is kept in touch with current developments; however, there has been little formal training for staff in RE in recent years.

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

- RE makes a positive contribution to the development of a number of aspects of pupils' learning, most notably their ability to talk about their ideas and work with others. In RE lessons, pupils work effectively in small groups and participate well in discussions. There are examples of pupils

using research activities to carry out simple enquiries. Overall, however, there is scope to extend the way the subject contributes to learning by: incorporating a more sustained enquiry-based approach to learning; using more challenging literacy activities; and, encouraging older pupils to engage with some of the more controversial issues related to the world of religion and belief.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the curriculum to extend the scope for more sustained learning with stronger cross-curricular links, especially with literacy
- ensuring that planning incorporates a stronger focus on the overarching purpose and direction of the pupils' learning
- extending the level of challenge for more able pupils.

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