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Dear Mrs Rubin

Ofsted 2010-11 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 18 May 2010 to look at work 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- While standards in RE are below the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus, pupils' progress is satisfactory. However, the pattern of achievement varies significantly across different year groups and different aspects of the subject.
- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have a simple understanding of some features of different religions. They know a range of biblical stories and recognise that religion is important in some people's lives. However, the range of vocabulary they use when exploring religions is very limited.
- Pupils make better progress as they move through Key Stage 2 and by Year 6 they have a reasonable understanding of the distinctive features of different religions. When given the chance, they can identify important

questions to ask when enquiring into religion, but do not always have enough opportunity to extend these questions and translate them into more independent investigative work. As a result, some of the more able pupils are not challenged sufficiently. The range of subject vocabulary they use when talking about their study is still quite limited.

- Progress through the school is uneven as a result of inconsistencies in the quality of planning, teaching and learning in different year groups. There is also a significant difference in the approach being taken to different aspects of the RE curriculum. While non-Christian religions are explored in an appropriately open and investigative way, this approach is not adopted consistently in work on Christianity. Too often, work on the Christian tradition is narrowed by an over-emphasis on recounting stories.
- RE makes a positive contribution to pupils' wider personal development. However, at times, the focus on this dimension of the subject is allowed to limit the challenge in some of the work. Pupils develop a positive attitude towards diversity. Through RE and its enrichment programme in assemblies and other activities, such as liturgical dance sessions, pupils have opportunities to explore their feelings and values at a deeper level.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory.

- Teaching in RE is variable in quality but is satisfactory overall. The lessons observed were generally organised well and pupils were attentive. Teaching assistants provide good support. Some use is made of pair and group work, although the tasks given to the pupils are not always matched well to their ability. Careful attention is given to ways in which the subject can support the promotion of oracy and literacy skills. However, on occasion, this limits the challenge in the tasks set. Much of the writing, for example, is limited to recount or descriptive work.
- The teachers' planning and teaching reveal the lack of a confident and consistent approach towards learning in RE. This is reflected in the uneven progress made by pupils. When the focus is clearly on enquiry, teachers are more confident in their delivery. However, where the emphasis shifts to the less challenging recounting of biblical stories, teaching and learning are less effective and the focus of the activities is sometimes unclear.
- While teachers use a variety of resources the range of teaching strategies is relatively narrow. There is limited opportunity for more independent work. There is little evidence of pupils using a wider range of creative or higher level investigative skills in RE.
- Teachers mark RE work regularly and record pupils' progress using a set of level descriptors. Marking often refers back to the learning objective for the task but rarely challenges pupils or sets targets to help them move forward.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school uses a combination of the local authority and diocesan syllabuses to structure its RE programme. However, the school is finding it difficult to translate the locally agreed syllabus into effective classroom practice. RE is delivered regularly throughout the year and pupils receive their statutory entitlement.
- The long-term planning ensures there is a clear balance between work on Christianity and other religions. However, the consistency of approach towards these religions is less secure. Greater clarity is needed on the ways to teach about Christianity. Too often, the material is not contextualised appropriately in terms of an open investigation into what the faith means for Christians. There is not enough focus on identifying the core concepts in each unit of work or the progressive development of the skills of investigation at the heart of the subject.
- The quality of medium-term planning varies significantly and no consistent approach is being adopted. Some sets out the overarching purpose and direction of a topic clearly; in other cases, where this is not clear, teachers are unsure what they are trying to achieve and this leads to planning of a lower quality.
- Strong links have been forged with the local church and these provide some good opportunities to enrich pupils' learning. Contacts within other religious communities are used and the school is aware of the need to extend the opportunities for pupils to visit other places of worship in the local community.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- You are currently taking an acting role in leading RE within the school in the absence of the substantive post holder. The local vicar, who is on the governing body, is providing good support. A very clear commitment to the subject is linked closely to the wider promotion of the school's faith ethos.
- There is a clear and well-informed understanding of the priorities for improvement. The current action plan, discussed with the governors, identifies the key need for more training to develop the subject further.
- Arrangements for monitoring the quality of RE and securing consistency in planning and teaching are very limited. Plans are in place to formalise these from next September.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring a more consistently open and enquiring approach across all areas of study in RE
- securing greater consistency in the quality of the planning and teaching
- providing more opportunities for greater challenge and more sustained exploration and independent learning in RE

- providing more opportunities for pupils to visit diverse local religious 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, SACRE and Manchester Diocese and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector