

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



30 June 2010

Mr R Bushby
Headteacher
Seaham Trinity Primary School
Princess Road
Seaham
County Durham
SR7 7SP

Dear Mr Bushby

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 16 June 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff 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 with some good features and a good capacity for improvement.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory with some good features.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils gain standards that are broadly in line with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. The pattern of progress made by the pupils is uneven across the school and is satisfactory overall.
- Some aspects of pupils' achievement by the end of Key Stage 1 are good. They are able to identify relevant questions when investigating religions and the more able can undertake simple enquiries. Pupils are developing a simple but effective framework of language about religion and show a good understanding of some important ideas such as the notion that the Buddha was trying to find out how people can become happy.

- Pupils' progress across Key Stage 2 is uneven. Some pupils make good progress in exploring religious material and offer their own thoughts about, for example, the Ten Commandments and the Hindu idea that God is everywhere. However, the pattern of achievement is not consistent. Sometimes work lacks challenge and there is an over-emphasis on pupils collecting information about religion. On other occasions, work focuses on learning from religion but does not provide enough opportunity to develop pupils' understanding of religious material.
- RE makes a positive contribution to pupils' wider personal development. They enjoy RE and finding out about different religions. Where RE is effective, it makes a positive contribution to developing pupils' learning, when, for example, they have opportunities to develop their skills of enquiry, engage in lively discussion of ethical issues, or reflect on their feelings and responses to religious questions.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- A distinctive strength of the lessons observed was the way in which teachers established an appropriate ethos of learning well matched to the distinctive nature of the topic. For example, where the Year 2 lesson focused on developing an enquiry into Buddhism, the teacher encouraged pupils to share their prior learning, identify their next steps and undertake independent investigations. The best teaching also secures good links to literacy when, for example, a class produced a diary entry for a day in the life of a Sikh child.
- Where RE is effective, teachers use a range of well-managed teaching strategies such as structured debate and discussion, pair and group work, and more reflective experiential activities. Good use is made of questioning to check pupils' understanding and extend their thinking. Resources are used well to encourage more independent learning. Work is tailored carefully to match different needs and teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning.
- This good quality is inconsistent across the school. Some of the work set is not challenging pupils sufficiently. As a result of some gaps in teachers' subject expertise, the potential to extend pupils' depth of understanding of religious material is not always fully realised. Occasionally, this can lead to misunderstanding of what is appropriate in RE.
- The school has identified the need to develop its marking and assessment arrangements. There are good examples of teachers annotating planning to record pupils' progress and some of the pupils' work is marked with helpful comments. Overall, practice is variable and pupils are not always given a clear idea about their success and their next steps in learning.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school follows the locally agreed syllabus closely. This has secured a balanced coverage of the subject and has enabled teachers to identify key questions to help structure and focus the learning.
- Some good use is made of 'blocked' units of RE ensuring that learning is more sustained and links are made with other areas of the curriculum. Some teachers are producing good medium-term planning which interweaves the two areas of attainment 'learning from' and 'learning about' religion effectively. The balance of work across different religions is appropriate although, occasionally, the approach towards the teaching of Christianity can lack clarity of purpose.
- The good practice is not consistent and the school has yet to establish clearly defined and shared approaches to planning the overall RE curriculum. Little use is made of levels to inform planning and, as a result, the work does not always match the pupils' needs. In addition, the time allocated to RE across the school is not monitored carefully and there is some inconsistency in securing the pupils' full subject entitlement.
- Some good links have been forged with the local church, although these could be extended to enrich further the pupils' work in RE. There are few opportunities for pupils to gain first-hand experience of other religions in the local region.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The school recognises the subject has not benefitted from strong leadership in the past but now plans to appoint a new coordinator from next September. A clearly defined RE policy makes appropriate reference to the locally agreed syllabus.
- Leaders have not monitored the planning and teaching of RE. However, the use of the locally agreed syllabus together with the strong whole-school focus on developing pupils' confidence and skills as learners has meant that, in some classes, the quality of RE is good. However, this is not consistent across the school
- The school has recently evaluated the issues facing the subject and produced a sensible and well-considered action plan which has included recognition of the need to provide some subject training for staff. Where practice is effective, the contribution which RE can make to promoting pupils' learning has been recognised. This good practice, together with the action plan, provides confidence that the school has good capacity to improve the overall provision for RE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring greater consistency in the quality of planning and teaching of RE by securing the subject's leadership and providing training for staff
- extending the opportunities for pupils to gain first-hand experience of the diversity of religion and belief within the local region.

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 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