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Ms S Jones
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Jones

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 8 February 2011 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is outstanding.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is outstanding.

- Pupils in this culturally diverse school make very good progress in RE because they are keen to learn, enjoy being in class and are taught by skilled and enthusiastic teachers. Stimulating and lively teaching from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, together with careful monitoring of their progress, ensures that almost all pupils reach standards at least in line with the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus, and many progress beyond this point. With varied starting points, and diverse abilities on entry, pupils' rapid progress takes most of the cohort to the national standard by the time they leave. The school has well-formulated plans and challenging targets in place to raise these standards further.

- Particular qualities evident in pupils' achievements in Key Stage 1 are seen in the way they are able to discuss their own ideas about stories from different traditions, and to ask perceptive questions, for example about the experiences of those who take part in the hajj. Their animated discussions in small groups show that they have understood the significance of religion in the lives of other people. Towards the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils show an ability to absorb quite sophisticated ideas, for example about links between the beliefs and ideals of Gandhi and Martin Luther King and how these might be related to some of the issues in their own lives.
- Because of their varied backgrounds and the way the RE curriculum has been structured to meet their needs, pupils benefit from their learning in terms of their own spiritual and moral development. They quickly acquire a sensitive attitude to diversity and enjoy the interaction between their different family backgrounds. They value what they learn about those who are different from themselves and RE contributes particularly to their growing confidence in their own culture and enriches their attitudes to each other in the classroom.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is outstanding.

- All the teaching observed was of a high quality, both in terms of planning, presentation and assessment and in the outcome for pupils' learning. Lessons were meticulously planned with very clearly defined outcomes. They provide enjoyment through a variety of interesting and stimulating activities, and secure progress through a carefully prepared sequence of progressive questions.
- Careful attention is given to ensuring that pupils engage with the processes of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion in a balanced way. Consequently, during Key Stage 2, they are beginning to understand the relationship between the two areas of attainment. This was seen to very good effect in a lesson with pupils in Years 5 and 6. After carrying out an unusual but very effective comparison between a Christian and a Muslim story, pupils were encouraged to use their conclusions to develop an understanding of some basic ethical principles and the relationship between these and making their own moral choices today.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress is exceptional. Teachers monitor pupils' achievement in RE regularly through both formal and informal assessment, and use the information in planning the next level of their work. The thoroughness with which this process is followed contributes strongly to the very good progress that pupils make in the subject.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is outstanding.

- The RE curriculum is well matched to the needs of pupils. Using the locally agreed syllabus, and other national guidance and support material selectively, pupils are enabled to follow an interesting and challenging pathway through their subject learning. The school's schemes of work are considered very carefully with an emphasis on quality of understanding rather than quantity of information. Each unit is planned with careful attention to differentiated learning, to key ideas and concepts, such as symbolism or the 'sacred', and to ways of presenting and developing their own opinions, using simple reasons and arguments to support them.
- All teachers contribute their own ideas to the schemes of work with suggestions about resources, imaginative activities and alternative ways of monitoring progress. The school is currently looking at ways of enhancing the use of cross-curricular links without compromising the integrity of the subject, for example through carefully designed 'learning days'. These bring together both distinctive subject contributions and more widely shared skills and concepts.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is outstanding.

- RE is very well led by an experienced teacher with a clear grasp of the educational structure of the subject as well as a sound knowledge of how to select suitable subject information to support pupils in developing their understanding. Some of this expertise has been derived from working closely with the local authority in interpreting the agreed syllabus. This, in turn, ensures that teachers are well informed about how to use their skills to support pupils' learning through highly effective curriculum guidance. The subject leader has also enthused other teachers and given them confidence in dealing with information about religion in the classroom. This contributes to a good sense of teamwork and a shared perception of the value of the subject for pupils.
- The subject also benefits from your leadership in ensuring that RE is well taught in the school and that arrangements are in place for monitoring the quality of subject teaching. Additionally, RE is very well resourced, particularly through the enthusiasm of class teachers in devising their own excellent visual resources and in using information and communication technology to the best advantage.
- There is a clear and accurate perception, through the review processes, of its strengths in subject teaching and learning. There is also a focused vision of how the quality of subject teaching can continue to develop, especially in relation to its contribution to community cohesion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending effective cross-curricular links between RE and other subject areas.

I hope that 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 may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Rudge
Additional Inspector