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Miss D Hall
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Hall

Ofsted 2011–12 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 4 November 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 four lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Standards in RE are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Some features of pupils' attainment are stronger than others. Progress is good with pupils building effectively on the wide range of experience of religion they bring to the school.
- Throughout Key Stage 1, pupils build a strong framework of language to enable them to talk with confidence about religion. Year 2 pupils can make links between different features of religions showing, for example, an understanding of the connections between the story, festival and symbolism of Divali.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have extended their knowledge and understanding across a wide range of religious traditions. They can explain

significant similarities and differences between religions. They also develop their skills of investigation showing the ability to ask pertinent questions and interpret different expressions of religious belief. Pupils can reflect on, and make connections between, different aspects of religion and their own experience. In one Year 4 class, for example, the pupils explored the significance of the concept of authority in the story of Moses and how it related to their own lives.

- Pupils are less confident in discussing issues related to the wider truth and value of religion. There is also scope to extend the development of the skills of enquiry more systematically across the year groups.
- The quality of learning in RE is generally good. As well as having opportunities to develop the skills of enquiry, pupils work collaboratively and exercise independence. There are some positive examples of RE supporting literacy although again this could be extended further.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes towards RE. They value the opportunities to explore each other's beliefs and develop strong respect for differences of viewpoint and culture. Behaviour in the lessons observed was excellent.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Lessons are well-planned using the local authority scheme of work to provide the basic structure. Teachers use a wide range of different activities and strategies to sustain pupils' interest and maintain the pace and focus of the learning. Questioning is used effectively to extend pupils' thinking. In one Year 3 lesson, for example, pupils were asked to identify questions to ask about the figure of Lakshmi and suggest possible interpretations of the imagery. Good use is made of a range of resources to stimulate learning. In one Year 6 class, the teacher used a variety of artefacts to help the pupils develop their appreciation of the significance of the festival of Rosh Hashanah.
- Relationships are very positive, modelling the values of respect and openness which permeate the ethos of learning within RE lessons.
- While pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well-supported in class, lessons do not always build in more detailed differentiation to ensure that all pupils are extended appropriately.
- Occasionally, the learning objectives of the lessons are too diffuse or over-complex; when this happens, the structure of the learning can lose focus and the relationship between the two areas of attainment, 'learning about' and 'learning from', religion can become confusing.
- The quality of marking is variable and assessment arrangements are underdeveloped. There are good examples of teachers making perceptive comments on work and engaging in a dialogue with pupils about their progress, but this is not consistent. There are no systematic arrangements for recording pupils' progress. Learning outcomes are generally not

differentiated making it difficult for teachers to identify different levels of performance within a class.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good and is well-supported by a strong pattern of activities designed to enrich the pupils' learning.

- The curriculum is very closely based on the local authority exemplification scheme of work. This provides a broad and balanced coverage of the major world religions and incorporates activities related to and interlinking the two main areas of attainment.
- The school is seeking to incorporate RE more securely within their wider creative curriculum. In practice, it is proving difficult to integrate the local authority scheme into this process. The inclusion of six half-termly units of RE each year also limits the scope for integration. As a result, RE remains relatively isolated from the wider curriculum and the scope for more sustained enquiry in RE is restricted by the current curriculum model.
- Much of the planning does not include differentiated learning objectives and the focus of the learning in some parts of the planning is not clear or coherent.
- Despite some limitations, the overall curriculum does enable pupils to make good progress. Very good use is made of visits to, and visitors from, local religious communities. This enriches the pupils' learning but also ensures that RE strongly supports the promotion of community cohesion. The subject makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The subject leader is experienced and a member of the local SACRE. She is well supported by the senior leadership of the school and the curriculum teams. A major strength of RE is the way in which it contributes to and reflects the wider values of the school. It provides a very positive context for building positive community relationships and involving parents actively in the life of the school.
- It has been recognised that there is a need to review the current heavy dependence on the local authority exemplification materials to ensure that the curriculum provides the most effective basis for RE in the school. Of particular note is the need to develop more links with the wider curriculum and incorporate a stronger emphasis on the skills of enquiry.
- Extensive arrangements are in place for monitoring and improving the subject. A strong feature is the active involvement of all staff in an analysis of the strengths and areas for development. Pupils have opportunities to feed back their response to the subject. At present, however, this process is not always rigorously focused on raising standards.

- The arrangements for staffing RE are well managed and the resources for the subject are impressive. Good use has been made of contacts within the local community to provide some authentic artefact materials.
- The provision for staff development is well targeted. The subject leader works closely with the curriculum teams and prioritises training for newly and recently qualified teachers. The subject benefits from links with SACRE and local support networks.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the curriculum to:
 - ensure that all the schemes of work have a clear focus and include differentiated learning objectives to support better assessment
 - build in a stronger focus on enquiry-based learning and more opportunities for pupils to discuss and evaluate issues about religion
 - provide more opportunities for cross-curricular links
- developing the assessment arrangements for RE by:
 - identifying assessment opportunities more clearly
 - using levels of attainment more effectively in planning
 - developing a simple manageable method of recording pupils' progress.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector