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Mrs S Hewitt-Clarkson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 20 March 2012 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 parts of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good with some outstanding features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good with some outstanding features.

- Pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 is at least in line with the targets set out in the Birmingham agreed syllabus ('learning from faith' and 'learning about religious traditions'), in the context of the 'dispositions' set out therein. For some pupils, attainment is above expectations. Overall, this represents good, and for some, outstanding achievement from their well-below average starting points. Pupils have a good grasp of key religious beliefs and concepts, such as forgiveness and salvation and they willingly engage in meaningful discussions. Pupils form judgements in a reasoned way, considering the views and opinions of others.
- Pupils across Key Stage 1 show a good interest in elements of religious life and by the end of Year 2 can recall and retell some stories they that have encountered, such as the Good Samaritan, and explain what such stories

mean. They can explain why people come together in religious life and appreciate that there are different religious traditions. Pupils continue to make good progress across Key Stage 2 and, by the end of Year 6, pupils are very confident in discussing moral and religious issues. They are equally adept at relating teachings from religion and belief to their own lives.

- The contribution of RE to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils have a genuine interest in learning about different religions and beliefs in the context of a culturally diverse society. Pupils have a very positive view about the subject, saying, for example, 'At home we learn about our own religion, however, in school it's great because we are able to learn about different faiths'. A much younger pupil said, 'I like RE. I think it's really important to care about things and about people'.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Lessons are planned in detail and careful attention is paid to ensure that pupils are involved in their learning. Teachers use good stimulus activities to engage pupils' interest and resources are matched well to pupils' different needs. Teaching assistants are also actively engaged in promoting good learning for those who need support because of their specific needs. Behaviour in the lessons observed was good.
- Teachers explain the purpose of learning carefully and use questioning well, including for checking the quality of learning as the lesson progresses. The regular use of a 'no hands up' strategy by teachers, who choose pupils randomly to respond to questions, ensures that pupils listen actively. Resources, including information and communication technology, are used well to enliven the learning. Good use is made of 'talk partners' and small group work which help to promote literacy skills in the subject.
- Assessment is a growing strength. Teachers evaluate lessons well so that the next steps are identified in developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. This year, teachers' assessment of how well pupils are progressing towards the agreed syllabus targets are being collected in a summative form for each year group. This provides leaders with an overview to help interrogate strengths and weaknesses. Peer- and self-assessment and dialogue with pupils enable them to have a view about their progress.
- There are examples of teachers fostering a sense of genuine enquiry, for example, when pupils explore questions of meaning and purpose, when considering the disposition 'being curious and valuing knowledge'. However, the potential of such opportunities for pupils to use more investigative approaches to learning, particularly in Key Stage 2, are not fully used.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- Planning is firmly linked to the agreed syllabus exemplar materials which teachers feel confident to use and they do so flexibly.
- Suitable links are made with other curriculum areas and pupils are encouraged to use good literacy skills in the subject, for example in extended pieces of writing and in speaking and listening.
- The provision is enhanced through a range of visitors and visits, including to some local places of worship. Speakers from the community and the staff's expertise are also used well to provide pupils with first-hand experience of faith and belief. Pupils speak warmly about the mutual benefits of their links with several local primary schools which gives good opportunities to experience diverse social backgrounds and faith traditions.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The subject benefits from strong and committed leadership, supported well by senior leaders. The subject leader is hardworking, enthusiastic and passionate about improving pupils' achievement further. Staff teaching RE are supported well with resources and good advice.
- Monitoring of teachers' planning, pupils' work, routinely seeking staff and pupils' views and findings from lesson observations all help to inform action planning. Professional development opportunities are taken up and followed through to classroom practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- maximising opportunities for pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, to use more investigative, enquiry-based approaches to learning to help raise standards further in the subject.

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

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector