

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



04 December 2007

Mrs Aleksandra Hartshorne
Headteacher
Sharples Primary School
Hugh Lupus Street
Bolton
Lancashire
BL1 8RX

Dear Mrs Hartshorne

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 December 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE the visit had a particular focus on the subject's contribution to the promotion of community cohesion.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with your self, and the subject leader for RE, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory. However, the decision to include aspects of the subject within the schools' International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) primary years' programme is starting to have a very positive impact on the effectiveness of the subject in the school.

Achievement and standards

The standards pupils attain in RE are broadly average and their achievement in the subject is satisfactory.

- Standards in RE are broadly in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus. However, there is considerable unevenness in the pattern of these standards and the pupils' achievement in RE.
- Where the subject is being integrated within the IBO programme in parts of Years 1 and 4, standards are above average and pupils make

good progress. They quickly acquire the ability to ask pertinent questions about religion and they utilise the skills of investigation effectively. As a result, for example, pupils in Year 1 studying celebrations used a range of technical subject language well and were able to link aspects of their learning about Divali together with confidence. Similarly, pupils in Year 4 had undertaken some impressive extended research work on the way dress can express religious belief.

- Where the core RE programme is delivered on the more traditional one hour a week model, standards are average and achievement is only satisfactory. While pupils make reasonable progress in some aspects of the subject linked to 'learning from' religion, their overall achievement is at best satisfactory. They do not always understand the religious context of some of the story material they are dealing with and the pattern of some of their learning is rather superficial. There is limited scope for older pupils to explore their own beliefs and discuss their opinions about religion.
- The pupils' personal development in the context of RE is good, particularly in the context of the IBO programme, where the subject significantly enhances their skills as independent and collaborative learners. Pupils generally find RE interesting and are keen to explore the diversity of religion. They understand how the subject helps them develop respect for the beliefs and culture of others.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- All the lessons observed during the inspection were well-organised. The classes were managed effectively and relationships with pupils were positive. As a result pupils generally enjoy the subject. Good use is made of ICT and teaching assistants to support pupils' learning.
- In the best lessons, those delivered in the context of the IBO programme, the teaching was highly effective and promoted good quality investigative work. Learning was managed very skilfully to promote successful use of group work and independent research. Teachers' questioning and interventions were well-planned to ensure that the main focus of learning was maintained and the pupils remained on track. Good use was made of a wide range of engaging resources and tasks.
- In the lessons which take place within the core RE programme, teaching and learning are satisfactory. While lessons are generally orderly and some good use is made of activities such as drama, a number of factors inhibit their overall effectiveness. Insufficient use is made of questioning to ensure pupils are challenged and their understanding is assessed. Lessons are too teacher-centred with insufficient opportunity for independent learning and too much of the written work is narrowly focused or copied. The structuring of the links between AT1 'learning about' and AT2 'learning from' religion are not structured effectively. As a result the work on AT1 lacks challenge and the AT2 tasks are not focused on the application of their learning about religion.

- Pupils' work is assessed regularly. However, again, there is a sharp difference in the quality of practice between the IBO work and the core RE programme. In the IBO units, the learning objectives are clearly defined and, in the case of the best teaching, very good use is made of differentiated objectives, tasks and assessment criteria to ensure work is carefully focused on the pupils' needs. As a result all pupils make good progress in these lessons and understand the ways in which their learning is to be assessed. While, at present, the planning and assessment of the IBO work is not securely linked to the two attainment targets and levels used in RE, this would not be difficult to achieve. Elsewhere in the core RE programme, work is marked routinely but the planning and assessments are not differentiated. As a result, the pupils do not understand the basis on which their work is assessed.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- While the quality of RE within the IBO programme is impressive, the wider core RE curriculum is at best satisfactory.
- In the absence of any recent guidance about the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus, and knowing a revised syllabus is being planned, the school has taken some cautious steps towards a thorough review of the RE curriculum. As part of their move towards the introduction of the IBO programme, two RE-related units have been launched in years 1 and 4. These are blocked units of work focused on celebrations (Year 1) and 'I believe' (Year 4). Initial evidence suggests this is proving highly effective as a model for high quality delivery of the subject. They secure, for example, integration of RE with wider areas of the pupils' learning.
- However, the school has also recognised that much work needs to be done to ensure that this model is able to deliver the full requirements of the current, and any revised, agreed syllabus. For this reason it has maintained a core RE programme which is delivered on a week by week basis throughout Years 2-6 by the subject co-ordinator and by the higher level teaching assistant in Year 1. Here, use is being made of a patchwork of units drawn from a neighbouring local authority and the QCA. The rationale of these units is not always fully understood because they are being used independently of their original context. As a result, the core programme lacks coherence and continuity. The pattern of work on the Christian tradition, in particular, requires greater continuity and progression. Specifically, the balance and integration of work in the two key areas of attainment are not planned well. Crucially, the attainment targets and levels are not being used as a basis for planning in the core RE programme.
- The school is very aware of the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of the IBO RE programme and is rightly keen to extend this further as the basis for its core RE programme.
- Some use is made of enrichment activities including visits and visitors to support pupils' learning in RE but there is scope to extend this further.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- RE is managed and led by the deputy headteacher who has a strong specialist background in the subject. The school is not aware of any recent opportunities within the local authority for professional development or participation in support networks linked to RE. As a result the school has relied on drawing support materials from a range of external sources. While the RE has not been subject to any recent whole school development programme, the initiatives taken by you and the IBO co-ordinator to integrate RE within IBO programme are exciting and innovative, indicating a good capacity for future improvement.
- The subject follows the wider whole school model of monitoring and, as part of this exercise, has undertaken some good work in, for example, talking to pupils about their views of the subject. A start has been made in using the local authority's model of subject self-evaluation. At present, however, the subject is not being monitored systematically and self-evaluation is not based on a clear view of the pupils' standards and achievement in RE. The RE co-coordinator is not fully involved in the evaluation of the RE component of the IBO programme. A well-ordered improvement plan is in place which is focused on reviewing and extending the current provision for the subject.
- While a start has been made in drawing up documentation to record pupils' progress in the subject this does not currently relate clearly enough to the use of levels in planning and assessment.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. There is a clear commitment to the subject as a context for securing an understanding and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity. Pupils are actively encouraged to value and respect difference. The curriculum reflects this diversity and the decision to introduce RE into the IBO programme provides a particularly effective context for pupils to engage in depth with the way religion impacts of people's daily lives. The diversity of religion within the local population is valued and the school has successfully secured the confidence of parents that their faith is treated with respect. As a result pupils from different faith backgrounds happily engage in celebrations from a variety of traditions knowing these are handled sensitively and appropriately by the school. While some good use is made of the local religious communities to enrich learning in RE through visits and visitors, there is scope to extend this further.

Inclusion

The arrangements for ensuring the inclusion of all pupils in RE are good. Effective use is made of teaching assistants and other adult help in lessons to ensure all pupils make progress and can access the learning. In the best

lessons, the planning is very skilfully devised to ensure the diversity of learning needs are met and are assessed. The IBO programme is particularly well-suited to support inclusion and, for example, promote higher levels of challenge for more able pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- monitoring and evaluating the impact of the IBO programme on pupils' learning in RE, and, as appropriate, exploring the potential to extend the involvement of RE further within the programme
- developing the use made of attainment targets and levels of attainment in both the planning and assessment of RE
- ensuring that the best practice in developing independent, investigative learning in RE is extended across the wider provision for the subject.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector