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Mrs Dawn Watson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Watson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 October 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 two lessons and the school assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory with some good features.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is satisfactory.

- The standards in RE reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are above the expectations of the agreed syllabus and this represents good progress across the key stage. By the end of Year 6 standards are broadly in line with expectations representing satisfactory progress at Key Stage 2.

- By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils have a good framework of understanding about religion. They have a good familiarity with stories from the Christian tradition and are able to link these to aspects of their experience. They are aware that religion is diverse and they are beginning to use some important religious terminology with confidence.
- By the end of Key Stage 2 the pupils have developed their knowledge of key features of a variety of religions. They recognise similarities and differences between different traditions and can use a range of religious concepts appropriately. However, their knowledge and understanding of Christianity, despite the attention paid to the faith in the curriculum, is rather fragmented and their capacity to debate religious issues could be extended further.
- The contribution made by RE to pupils' personal development is good. Pupils are positive about RE. Pupils in Year 6, for example, expressed the view that RE is valuable because it provides good opportunities to find out about different people's beliefs and ways of life. Care is taken, particularly with the younger children, to ensure they have opportunities to reflect on their experience in the light of their learning about religion.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory overall and some key features of lessons are good.

- A number of important aspects of the teaching and learning in RE are good. Lessons are well-managed and the relationships between the teachers and their pupils are good. Some effective use is made of creative work to stimulate interest and provide opportunities for pupils to express feelings and ideas. Much teaching is based on good subject knowledge, is thoughtful, and incorporates reflective activities and opportunities for discussion.
- However, a number of key aspects of planning are under-developed and limit the impact of the more positive features of teaching. The structure of some of the learning does not ensure that a clear focus on appropriate learning objectives is maintained. Some tasks are not challenging enough and teachers are slightly reluctant to pursue more investigative and controversial elements of the learning. For example, there is sometimes a tendency to pull away from exploring the more challenging aspects of biblical material in favour of making rather obvious but low level links to the children's experience.
- Teachers frequently make careful notes to record and evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching on the planning documentation but at present the assessment and reporting of pupils' progress is not informed sufficiently by a clear understanding of levels of attainment. The impact and reliability of these assessment arrangements is limited by uncertainties about using levels to plan clear learning objectives.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Improvements are required in the quality of the RE curriculum to ensure the effective features of teaching are translated into pupils' good progress. While a comprehensive scheme of work for RE exists, there has been an ambiguity in understanding the statutory basis for RE in the school. As a voluntary controlled school, the main RE curriculum should be based on the requirements of the Oldham agreed syllabus. The current planning is based on a combination of older and more recent diocesan guidance.
- While planning in relation to the teaching of non-Christian religions is relatively clear, the pattern of work within and between units on Christianity tends to lack continuity. The current pattern of work restricts the scope for older pupils to explore religious issues and concepts effectively.
- There is currently limited planning to develop cross-curricular links with, in particular, literacy and oracy although there are timely plans in place to focus on this as part of a whole school review of planning.
- The provision of enrichment activities to support learning in RE is good with a range of visits and visitors providing opportunities to encounter local representatives from both Christian and non-Christian communities.

## Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- RE is managed by an enthusiastic and very capable subject leader who receives good support from colleagues. As deputy head during a period of difficulties within the school, her attention has focused, rightly, on sustaining a sound profile for the subject while helping to address other pressing whole school priorities.
- As a result, while those teaching the subject treat it seriously and ensure it is delivered professionally, there has been limited opportunity recently to monitor and improve the effectiveness of the provision and for staff training. Some key aspects linked to whole school planning and assessment have not been developed sufficiently. The school has carried out a recent self-evaluation of the subject which is an honest assessment of the current priorities.
- The publication this year of a new Oldham agreed syllabus provides the ideal context for a review and updating of the provision. In preparation for this, the subject leader has maintained good links with local support networks and built up an effective resource base for the subject.
- While the current subject improvement plan focuses on important priorities in the management of the subject, there is a need to balance this with objectives related more directly to raising pupils' achievement.

## The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a very positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils value the contribution the subject makes to the development of their understanding of the religious and cultural diversity of the area. The links with the local clergy and church are used positively and a number of visits are undertaken to places of worship of other faiths represented in the area. A new development linking with a school in a more ethnically diverse community in Oldham will provide an excellent opportunity to contextualise this dimension of the subject further. Teaching makes sensitive and appropriate use of the religious diversity within the school to promote understanding and respect for difference.

## Inclusion

The arrangements for securing the inclusion of all pupils in RE are good overall. The use of in-class support with less able pupils is effective in ensuring they are actively involved in their learning. There is scope to extend the rate of progress of more able pupils by providing more opportunity for them to develop their skills in investigating and interpreting religious material. Many are ready to engage in more challenging debate about religion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, using the opportunity provided for publication of the 2007 Oldham agreed syllabus, are:

- refocusing the subject improvement plan on the priority of implementing the syllabus
- revising the current curriculum to ensure it incorporates greater continuity and progression, particularly in work on Christianity
- developing the use of levels in planning the curriculum and in assessing and reporting pupil progress
- reviewing, at the appropriate time, the arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

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