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Mrs V Fryer
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fryer

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and children, during my visit on 02 June 2008 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 creative thinking 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. 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 yourself, the chair of governors and your subject-co-ordinator, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils in RE are above the expectations of the agreed syllabus and their achievement is satisfactory with good features.

- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils reach standards which are just above the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus. However, the pattern of achievement is uneven largely because of limitations in the current curriculum, which is closely based on the requirements of the locally

agreed syllabus. The school has rightly identified that the pupils make more progress in relation to 'learning about' religion although there are examples of pupils also achieving well in relation to 'learning from' religion. This was particularly evident in Year 6 where pupils exploring the Good Samaritan parable were able to investigate the feelings and ideas within the story at some depth and then explain why the story might have significance within the wider context of the biblical narrative. Elsewhere pupils often make good progress in developing their knowledge of a range of key features of religion. From an early age they learn that religion is diverse and, by the end of Key Stage 1, they have recognised the importance of respecting the views of others.

- While there are examples of pupils progressing well in RE, this is not yet consistent enough to secure good achievement overall. Pupils do not always have enough opportunity to explore key concepts and investigate connections between different features of religion. There is also scope to extend the opportunities for pupils to explore their own ideas about key religious beliefs.
- The balance of the curriculum and the pattern of learning have been carefully designed to ensure that pupils from different religious and cultural backgrounds are able to progress equally well. The Muslim, Hindu and Christian traditions are well represented in the scheme of work, and activities are designed to enable pupils from different backgrounds to share and explore their own faith as well as that of others, however, on occasion the activities do not challenge the more able sufficiently.
- The subject is providing good opportunities to extend pupils' skills in thinking, speaking, and listening, although there is further scope to promote their written literacy skills in RE.
- The contribution of RE to the pupils' wider personal development is very good. Pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject and to the diversity of traditions represented within the school. The involvement in RE of parents and others from local religious groups is helping pupils develop awareness of their community. In RE pupils work very well together in groups and exercise a high level of personal responsibility for their learning.

Quality of teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Teaching and learning in RE involves a number of good features. Lessons are often well-planned and structured. Teachers use good stimulus activities to engage the pupils' interest and ensure they are actively involved in their learning. In the best lessons, activities are challenging and questioning by the teacher is well-focused. Careful attention is paid to linking the 'learning about' and 'learning from' aspects of the subject. Good use is made of group work to extend pupils' thinking. For example, pupils in Year 4 engaged in a useful

mind-mapping exercise designed to extend their understanding of festivals. Very effective use was made of a 'Role on the Wall' activity in a Year 6 lesson which prompted a high level of learning.

- While the best teaching secures good sustained learning which is based on clear objectives, occasionally these features are less evident. When this occurs, learning is less challenging and focused and activities are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils. In some cases teachers are not secure in their understanding of the subject and are over-reliant on the local authority's published scheme of work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE curriculum is closely based on the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. It is well-matched to the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of the pupils. However, the curriculum is less well-matched to their learning needs and its limitations are a major reason why good teaching is not always being translated into good achievement in RE.
- There are a number of positive features of the RE curriculum. Good use is made of the resources from local religious communities to enrich the pupils' learning; parents often visit to share aspects of their religious and cultural traditions although limited use is made of visits to places of worship. One year group is exploring new and creative models of delivery of the subject through closer integration of RE with other subject areas. Initial indications are that this is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and teachers' confidence.
- Generally the RE curriculum is following closely the model medium term schemes issued some years ago by the local authority. These are not proving a very effective basis for delivery of the subject. They tend to limit the independence of the teachers and are proving too inflexible as a basis for effective planning. Some teachers are over-reliant on the published material and are not adapting it effectively to match the needs of the pupils. However, where the teaching is particularly good, great care is being taken to develop and adjust the scheme to provide a more effective basis for lesson planning.
- The school is keen to extend the more creative approaches to the timetabling of RE. The co-ordinator is aware that a new locally agreed syllabus is being developed and is, understandably, awaiting this before under-taking a more radical review of the RE curriculum. At present most RE is delivered on a weekly basis in small units and, as a result, learning sometimes tends to be fragmented and links with other areas of the curriculum including PSHE and literacy are constrained.
- Some progress has been made in developing the familiarity of staff with the levels of attainment in the agreed syllabus. This has helped the subject co-ordinator to undertake some monitoring of the pattern

of pupils' achievement and identify areas for improvement. However, limited use is made of the levels in planning or assessment, and there is very little recording of pupils' progress in RE.

Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The subject co-ordinator provides good leadership for the subject. She has raised the profile of RE and established a more rigorous pattern of support and monitoring of the subject across the school. This has enabled her to identify clear priorities for improvement and staff development. The profile of RE subject leadership has benefited from a wider drive to develop middle management roles within the school.
- There is a clear commitment to reviewing the arrangements for the subject and introducing more staff development once the new locally agreed syllabus has been launched. A good start has been made in exploring ways in which RE might be incorporated within the more creative approach to curriculum planning being introduced across the school.
- An appropriate policy for the subject is in place. A review of the outcomes of monitoring linked to a subject development plan is well established. The pattern of monitoring RE includes pupil interviews, book and planning scrutiny, but has not as yet extended to include observation of teaching.

Creative thinking in RE

The school has made a start in developing the place of creativity in RE. It has identified the need to find ways of integrating RE more effectively within its more innovative curriculum developments. As a result, some teachers are beginning to use new ideas and move away from over-reliance on published exemplification material. However, these moves are at a relatively early stage of development. The move towards exploring links with other areas of the curriculum, including literacy, is very positive.

There are some good examples of pupils being engaged in more challenging and creative ways of working in the context of RE. The use of more structured thinking skills strategies and group work is having a positive impact on the quality of learning in some lessons. There is scope to extend the opportunities for pupils to use more creative forms of expression in RE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving further the provision for RE by reviewing the curriculum arrangements and the ways the subject can be linked into a more creative approach to planning

- securing greater consistency in the quality of planning and assessment of RE
- introducing opportunities for fieldwork and visits in RE.

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