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Mrs A Kerlake  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Kerlake

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 May 2009 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on the 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils in RE are well below average reflecting satisfactory achievement.

- Most pupils arrive in school with a limited background knowledge and experience of religion. They leave school with a sound understanding of some of the key features of a number of religions. From evidence seen in books and in lessons pupils are less adept in using what they have learned about the different religions to compare their own views about religious and moral issues with those of others.

- Pupils in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 have a rather restricted understanding of their learning in RE. They can recall some basic information but have only a limited ability to talk about their understanding of religion.
- Throughout Key Stage 2 pupils extend their knowledge of different religions. Where they make less progress is in developing their use of skills of investigation and in engaging with some of the key concepts and questions that underpin the subject because of weaknesses in the curriculum.
- The contribution of RE to the pupils' wider personal development is satisfactory. Pupils are interested in the subject and are attentive in lessons. The development of their ability to debate and discuss religious ideas and human issues is more constrained because teaching does not focus carefully enough on these skills.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- The teaching of RE has a number of strengths. Lessons are planned in detail and the management of pupils is consistently good. Teachers often demonstrate sound subject knowledge and use exposition appropriately. Relationships between adults and pupils are good so that there is a positive working atmosphere with teachers' expectations high in relation to pupils' attitudes to learning. Good use is made of praise to encourage pupils. Learning assistants and supported tasks are used effectively to help those with learning difficulties.
- The progress made by pupils in the lessons observed was broadly satisfactory. Pupils are sometimes slightly too passive and do not always engage actively enough in the lessons. The structure and sequencing of learning are not always quite secure and the links between activities are not made entirely clear to the pupils.
- While much of the learning in RE is well-organised and enjoyable, the range of skills pupils are required to use in investigating religion and belief and in organising their thinking are sometimes quite limited. Some of the tasks are not challenging enough to extend the skills of older more able pupils.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work for RE take appropriate account of the current Sheffield agreed syllabus. There are detailed long and medium term plans in place. While careful attention is paid to matching the curriculum to the needs and interests of the pupils, insufficient attention is paid in the planning to the progressive development of the skills of the subject.

- The school is at an early stage in developing assessment in RE. There is no level data on RE, and the school recognises it has some way to go to ensure that assessment is built more effectively into the planning in order to make the judgements of progress more reliable and manageable. A simple assessment structure is in place but it is not particularly effective in identifying whether all pupils are making appropriate progress. The school has recognised that reviewing and developing assessment in RE, linked to use of the levels in the agreed syllabus, is a priority for development.
- There is some use of visits and visitors to enrich pupils' experiences. However, given the limited direct experience that most pupils have of religion, there is scope to extend this further.

### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- A simple action plan linked to a subject review and a clear policy for the subject is in place. Progress has been made in developing resources for the subject, annotating examples of pupils' work to exemplify standards.
- The school recognises that opportunities for professional development and staff training in RE have been very limited and that, to date, little monitoring of the subject has occurred.

### Creative thinking in RE

Lessons and other activities are delivered in a wide range of ways using information and communication technology, art, drama. At present, however, the opportunities for pupils to use higher order skills of thinking are not developed consistently across all aspects of the learning in RE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the arrangements for assessing pupils' progress and monitoring the effectiveness of RE
- providing more training opportunities to help staff develop their understanding of how to plan and teach the key concepts and skills which underpin effective RE.
- extending the opportunities for pupils to have first hand contact with local religious communities through the use of fieldwork or visitors.

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

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
Her Majesty's Inspector