

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr S Boothroyd
Headteacher
Adel Primary School
Tile Lane
Adel
Leeds
LS16 8DY

Dear Mr Boothroyd

Ofsted 2009-10 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 2 December 2009 to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how well pupils are becoming effective learners 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with pupils and teachers, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Attainment in RE at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 is above the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus and reflects good achievement by the pupils.
- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have developed a good framework of knowledge and understanding about religion and belief. They understand, for example, how beliefs, festivals and stories are connected to each other

and can explain how religious symbols show how people belong to different faith communities.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have a secure grasp of, and can talk confidently about, the diversity of religion and belief. They can talk sensibly about the significance of religion in people's lives and in society more generally. They can express sensitive personal responses to religious material and see connections between different features of religions. They also develop the ability to use higher-order thinking skills in the context of RE when, for example, Year 5 pupils were asked to speculate and offer their own interpretation of the symbolism of the Christingle.
- All groups of pupils make good progress. Occasionally, the pattern of learning limits the scope for the more able to extend their ability to investigate more challenging religious ideas.
- RE makes a very positive contribution to all aspects of pupils' wider personal development. From an early stage, pupils are clear that RE promotes their understanding of different peoples' beliefs and way of life. They develop a strong interest in finding out about different religions and respond positively to opportunities for reflection.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is good.

- RE lessons are organised well and planned carefully. Good use is made of a range of imaginative activities and resources. In one Year 4 lesson, for example, excellent use was made of lively and creative re-telling of aspects of the nativity to enable pupils to explore the range of feelings involved in the story. Similarly, good use was made of a series of key words to help Year 1 pupils explore the ideas associated with giving presents.
- Tasks are explained carefully and adjusted skilfully to meet the range of abilities in each class. There are good opportunities for pupils to exercise independence when finding things out for themselves or making decisions about how to organise their ideas.
- While learning objectives are explained, these are not always expressed in ways that enable pupils to understand the purpose of the work. Occasionally, the subsequent tasks do not relate clearly to the stated objectives. The opportunities for sustained learning and for pupils to be actively involved in planning their work are sometimes restricted by the rather fragmented pattern of delivery of the subject.
- RE work is marked regularly with helpful comments. The school has a system for recording and monitoring pupils' progress against the levels of attainment but this is, in practice, over-complex and too imprecise. As a result, the school has underestimated the progress the pupils are making.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory with some good features.

- The RE curriculum is based on the QCA units of work supplemented by guidance about possible activities to include in each unit. In most terms, there are two units of RE delivered on a once-a-week basis. This provides a secure basis for covering and going beyond the breadth of study outlined in the locally agreed syllabus, but has the effect of fragmenting some of the pupils' learning. A range of links between RE and other aspects of the curriculum has been identified and, on occasions, the RE work is linked into wider themes and topics.
- While individual lessons are taught well and the school offers a wide range of good enrichment activities to support the pupils' learning in RE, the curriculum sometimes restricts the opportunities for more sustained learning and stronger links to other areas of the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- RE is led well by an experienced and committed subject coordinator who has a good understanding of the subject and of the priorities for its further development.
- The arrangements for monitoring the subject are mainly informal and lack a clear focus. A clear improvement plan is in place which recognises the need to extend resources and review the curriculum. The opportunities for professional development in RE have been limited in recent years and the school has not been able to access any significant support from the local authority and SACRE.
- A major strength of RE is the use of links with the local community to enrich pupils' learning and promote community cohesion. Parents and pupils from different religious groups actively discuss and explain aspects of their faith in lessons; good links have been forged with a diversity of places of worship in the local area.

How well pupils are becoming effective learners in RE

There are some good examples of RE supporting the development of pupils' learning. The good teaching actively promotes use of a range of different skills in RE lessons. During the visit, pupils were, for example: working effectively in groups; using higher-order skills of interpretation and speculation; and making decisions about ways of organising their work. While the overall picture is positive, a more focused pattern of curriculum delivery would enhance the scope for pupils to become more actively involved in a sustained enquiry-based approach to their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- exploring alternative models of curriculum delivery for RE to develop more opportunities for pupils to engage in sustained enquiry-based learning

- simplifying and sharpening the arrangements for using levels to assess and record pupils' progress in RE
- developing a more effective and focused approach to monitoring 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector