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Mrs J Carroll
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Carroll

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 20 May 2010 to look at work 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two class assemblies and two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with some good features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards across the school are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. This reflects satisfactory progress. In some topics and year groups where the work is challenging, pupils achieve well but there is some unevenness in progress across the school as a whole.
- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have developed a clear framework of knowledge and ideas which help them to shape their understanding of religion. They can explain similarities and differences between faiths and how some religious features link together. They are also able to investigate and interpret religious stories effectively. In one Year 2 lesson, for example, pupils were able to offer sophisticated ideas about the moral challenges posed in the Good Samaritan story.

- Pupils in Year 6 demonstrate a good grasp of some key aspects of the subject. For example, they were able to discuss the impact which persecution might have on a person's faith in the context of their work on the Holocaust. When given the opportunity, some pupils are able to identify a wide range of pertinent questions which have emerged from their study of religions and beliefs.
- These examples of good practice are not reflected consistently across the school. Some activities lack challenge and do not extend pupils' skills sufficiently. For example, there is too much reliance on lower level literacy tasks. The quality of learning varies across different religions. Work on Christianity, for example, is sometimes not as challenging as that in other faiths.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy the subject and take it seriously. When the subject is taught effectively, it builds on, and contributes to, the wider priority of the school to develop the pupils as confident, independent learners. It provides good opportunities to extend pupils' thinking about a range of moral and social issues and supports the development of their awareness of, and respect for, cultural diversity. On occasions, the subject also supports their spiritual development. For example, when Year 5 pupils were given a good opportunity to reflect on their feelings about the story of Muhammad in the cave.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory with some good features.

- RE lessons are organised well and relationships with pupils are good. Teachers ensure they have carefully researched the topics they are teaching. Effective use is made of in-class support to ensure all pupils can make progress.
- In the best lessons, teaching is imaginative and challenging. Teachers differentiate activities carefully to match pupils' needs. On occasions, they are willing to take risks and use more innovative approaches and resources in lessons. Some good use is also made of questioning and opportunities for pupils to assess their own progress.
- More generally, however, teachers often find it difficult to translate the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus into practice. Some RE is not matched well to pupils' needs and, as a result, the learning loses focus and lacks challenge. Activities are often planned to cover the required content rather than the wider learning objectives.
- The range of teaching strategies and resources is quite limited. However, there is some good practice in the use of information and communication technology and creative activities, particularly in some of the work on Islam.
- A simple but effective mechanism is in place to monitor pupils' progress although, in practice, the feedback given to pupils is not always expressed in ways which they can easily understand.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The school follows the pattern of units in the locally agreed syllabus carefully. This ensures the content of the syllabus is covered. Teachers work hard to translate these units into their medium-term planning.
- However, the syllabus is not providing teachers with an effective basis for designing the overall RE curriculum. There is too much emphasis on covering content. The pattern of delivery of half-term units, taught weekly, is fragmenting the pupils' learning. Medium-term planning does not focus carefully enough on the progressive development of skills and concepts.
- The schemes of work are of variable quality and do not ensure that they develop pupils' prior learning. On occasions, teachers invite pupils to identify key questions they want to investigate but these are not often followed through into subsequent learning. Although some planning identifies a range of appropriate learning objectives, key questions and pupil activities, this is not always the case. An appropriate programme of learning is incorporated within the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Some good use is made of local places of worship and interest to enrich pupils' learning in RE. Visits are made to the nearby mosque, local churches and the Jewish museum in Manchester.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- You are currently leading RE within the school in the absence of the substantive post holder. The school has a clear commitment to the subject within its wider emphasis on developing pupils' personal, emotional and social skills. A clear policy for the subject links to the wider policy on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- No specific action plan is in place for RE and it is not identified as a priority within the wider school improvement plan. As a result, monitoring and reviewing the provision have a relatively low priority.
- There has been no recent significant training in RE for the staff and there is limited opportunity for development work to explore any flexibility within the agreed syllabus to provide a more relevant overall curriculum.
- The subject makes a good contribution to the promotion of community cohesion, providing a context for developing local links most notably with the Muslim community in the area.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing and developing the content and pattern of delivery of the RE curriculum to ensure it provides a more challenging, progressive programme of learning better matched to pupils' needs and interests

- ensuring that the core skills of enquiry are built more systematically into the pupils' learning and that work reflects pupils' own questions and concerns more effectively
- developing a more systematic but manageable approach to monitoring and action planning in RE.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector