

## **Review of Religious Education (RE) in Essex schools**

### **Report following a visit to Alderton Infant School on 3 March 2009**

#### **Overall Evaluation**

The overall quality of the provision for RE at Alderton Infant School is outstanding. The headteacher is the subject leader; her hard work and effort ensure that RE plays an important part in the school's curriculum and in contributing to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

#### **1. Standards and achievement in RE**

Although children's attainment when they enter the school is generally below average, by the time pupils are at the end of Key Stage 1 their attainment in RE is broadly in line with the expectations set out in the Essex Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education and pupils achieve well in RE. The subject leader/headteacher carries out work scrutiny in RE as she does for other subjects and analyses attainment in this way. Data shows that attainment in RE has improved recently in line with other subjects of the curriculum.

Regular staff meetings are held to assess work in RE; teachers are asked to assess work against the Level Descriptions for RE as given in the Essex syllabus and moderation of the work is then carried out.

#### **2. The contribution of RE to students' personal development and well-being**

RE lessons play a key role in contributing to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Lessons include thoughtful discussions about aspects of moral and cultural development; the use of talk partners and role play encourages social development. One good example of this was seen in a lesson where a Reception class acts out the story of Samuel in the temple.

There are also good examples of spiritual development being encouraged, as for example when Year 2 children begin to learn to meditate focusing on photos of flowers during an introductory lesson on Buddhism; the atmosphere in the classroom as the children looked at their photos was exceptional. The specific links made in the curriculum to subjects such as ICT, speaking and listening, writing and art as well as to personal development contribute to progression in these other subjects as well as in RE.

#### **3. Teaching and learning in RE**

Planning for this subject, together with effective monitoring and evaluation ensure good quality of teaching and there is an emphasis on the provision of quality resources which are stored in a very convenient place for staff to access. Material for different topics is carefully collated, together with suitable books for use with the topic. Good use has been made of the Stanley Thornes scheme of work for RE which was recommended by Essex for KS1. Some elements of the QCA scheme of work are also used, such as the units on harvest and visiting a place of worship. Lessons include interesting use of ICT such as the opportunity to draw Samuel in the temple on the interactive whiteboard. This was a spontaneous action on the part of one child which indicated that such individual personal responses are valued in the school.

Opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills as well as writing are well-planned and integral to lessons. The development of speaking and listening skills is shown in

lessons where children's responses and ideas are also valued; art and drama are also linked to RE work in a purposeful manner. In talking about their school, children indicate they feel valued through the opportunities they are given to express their thoughts and feelings.

#### **4. The quality of the RE curriculum**

Planning for RE adheres carefully to the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, which is used as a starting-point for the school's own scheme of work. Planning also addresses the balance between AT1 and AT2 and evidence of this balance was observed in lessons seen, for example where learning objectives in a Year 1 class relate to a baby's needs and relating to others; this followed on a visit to a local church where the ceremony of baptism had been discussed with the children. This lesson also included a brief extract from a film (*The Sleeping Beauty*) in which gifts are given to the infant princess. The film was familiar to most of the children; setting it in the context of an RE lesson enhanced the learning and made the topic more attractive and accessible to children of that age.

There is a carefully planned themed approach to the curriculum and RE is linked into this, for example where the theme is Growth in Year 1 the RE lesson seen during the review is about birth and baptism.

#### **5. Leadership and management (L&M) of RE**

Leadership and management of RE is outstanding. The headteacher as subject leader has given much time and thought to this area of the curriculum, making it central to the curriculum. The SEF and school development plan both feature RE strongly, giving the subject its due importance as a key part of the school's curriculum.

The headteacher has spent much time and thought over the selection and organisation of the school's resources, making this an exemplary aspect of her leadership of RE. She continually seeks to extend and enrich the school's resources. Staff development opportunities have addressed links to ICT and the development of questioning in RE; some of these opportunities have been taken in the context of local consortium work.

The school has been fortunate in having a school development adviser in recent years who was very knowledgeable about RE; this was valued and utilised to develop the school's curriculum. More recently the school has been involved in the Global Dimensions project which has also has an impact on the development of RE.

Suggested areas for development

- a) The use of visitors and visits to enhance the curriculum further, in particular local links to develop community cohesion
- b) The introduction of the new syllabus, specifically to ensure that the needs of young children are met.