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Mr M Meaton  
Headteacher  
Ashgate Croft School  
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Derbyshire  
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Dear Mr Meaton

### **Ofsted 2011–12 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 September 2011 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and observation of four lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

#### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is good.

- Ashgate Croft is a community special school. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. These range from profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, physical and sensory impairment and autistic spectrum disorder. While attainment in RE is well below the expectations of the Derbyshire agreed syllabus, pupils' achievement is good.
- The very varied needs of the pupils mean that there is no straightforward pattern of achievement in RE. The school's own monitoring of pupils' progress reliably shows that the great majority of pupils make the expected progress from their different starting points. Many make good progress in relation to their different ability levels. For example, those pupils with moderate learning difficulties who are in Years 10 and 11 can

identify key religious figures from three main religions and explain their significance. Pupils with similar learning difficulties in Years 8 and 9 readily explain meanings in religious symbols. Overall, pupils respond very well to opportunities to reflect on their feelings.

- The pupils enjoy RE very much. In part, this is because they are encouraged to be active partners in learning. This ensures that the subject makes a powerful contribution to pupils' personal development, including their self-knowledge and self-esteem. They grow in confidence and respond positively to 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion.

### **Quality of teaching in RE**

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teaching in the lessons observed across the full range of learning difficulties demonstrated a number of strengths. Activities were engaging, challenging and fit for purpose. Tasks were carefully structured and suitably timed, so that a good pace in learning was sustained.
- The use of a wide range of resources, particularly sensory artefacts and items, contributes significantly to pupils' good progress in lessons. The provision of practical, visual and first-hand experiences enables pupils to engage effectively with the material and ideas they are exploring. Teachers use a variety of approaches to enable pupils to communicate their thoughts and feelings and to demonstrate what they know and understand. Interactive whiteboards enliven learning and good use is made of photographic evidence to record pupils' experience of learning in RE.
- The teaching is effective in matching tasks and activities to pupils' very different needs, supported by the effective deployment of in-class support. Therefore, all pupils participate fully and are encouraged to maintain interest and remain focused on learning. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils make a significant contribution to pupils' achievement.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress is undertaken conscientiously and is fit for purpose. Regular checking of pupils' progress in lessons and routine moderating of pupils' work ensures consistency in teachers' assessments.

### **Quality of the curriculum in RE**

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- Close attention is paid to adapting and implementing the concepts, skills, attitudes and processes identified in the Derbyshire agreed syllabus. Schemes of work have been revised recently and are guided by a commercial scheme which is specific for pupils with learning difficulties. Short-term planning is matched well to pupils' needs and makes an effective contribution to pupils' good progress.
- There is a suitable balance in the planning to ensure good breadth in the number of religions covered over the key stages and in ensuring reasonable progression in the development of pupils' understanding of

concepts. The use of creative and experiential approaches to learning is a notable strength in promoting pupils' personal development. The use of visitors and visits helps to supplement the school's provision.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE is led by an experienced and enthusiastic subject leader who has a very good grasp of the subject and how it can enrich pupils' learning. A careful audit of provision has led to an action plan which has suitable priorities. Informal monitoring of lessons, augmented by formal mechanisms for monitoring pupils' learning, ensures that quality assurance is secure.
- The subject leader provides effective support to staff through resources and the sharing of teaching ideas. Much of the training for staff is undertaken within the school. The subject is supported and managed effectively by the school's senior leaders.
- The evaluation of the recently implemented schemes of work is at an early stage. There is a strong commitment to monitoring the implementation of these schemes to identify strengths and areas for potential further improvement. The department has rightly chosen to investigate how teaching contributes to the progress of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that the recently introduced schemes of work are carefully evaluated to gauge how well they promote effective learning in RE.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Dilip Kadodwala**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**