

HCC Brokerage Visit Report

School	St Catherine's CE Primary School	Date	02/12/19
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Length of visit (including preparation and follow up): 1.5 days including visit preparation and follow up

Focus of visit & activities undertaken:

In July 2018, St Catherine's CE Primary School was inspected by Ofsted and judged to be a good school overall. Early Years provision was judged to be outstanding. The following areas for improvement were highlighted:

- Sustain and consolidate recent improvements in the quality of teaching that have led to pupils making stronger and more consistent progress.
- Improve provision for the most able pupils by ensuring that they are routinely provided with sufficient challenge in lessons.
- Improve systems for recording behavioural and other incidents so that records are clear and complete, and any emerging patterns can be identified easily.

The purpose of this visit was to look at the curriculum provision in light of the new Ofsted framework with a focus on foundation subjects and supporting subject leaders to lead more effectively in their subject area. In addition, the school's SIAMs inspection is imminent. Therefore, it was agreed that a deep dive in religious education (RE) would be the focus for the visit and that outcomes from this could be used to support in other foundation subject areas.

The headteacher provided relevant leadership documentation well in advance of the visit including the school improvement plan for 2019 – 2020 and the school's self-evaluation form. The school's curriculum over-view was available from the school website and was scrutinised prior to the visit along with pupils' published assessment information, previous reports and the most recent Ofsted report.

During the visit, documents were jointly reviewed in light of the preparatory activities and additional information from school leaders. The curriculum lead for RE was present for the whole visit and the headteacher was present for a large part of the visit. The deputy headteacher was present for the beginning of the visit.

Activities undertaken during the visit were:

- discussion with the headteacher and curriculum leader with responsibility for RE to explore long and medium term thinking and planning including the rationale for content choices and sequencing
- visits to two lessons in Year 6 with a focus on how pupils benefit from high quality education
- learning walk of the school environment, including visits to classes, with a focus on RE to explore provision in a wider context

- discussions with pupils, about their learning in lessons visited, exploring how learning is sequenced over time and the level of engagement of pupils
- visit to a whole school assembly on the theme of advent
- discussion with the headteacher and curriculum leader with responsibility for RE to draw together findings from the morning.

Discussions/ main findings /observations:

The headteacher explained that, although the school is a Church of England voluntary controlled school and a significant proportion of pupils in the school identify as Christian, many of these pupils do not go to church regularly. In addition, a minority of pupils belong to other faiths, namely Muslim, Sikh and Hindu. There is also a significant proportion of pupils in the school who do not identify with any religious group.

The religious education curriculum at St Catherine's is based on the Hertfordshire syllabus for religious education which was updated two years ago. Alongside the local syllabus, the school ensures that all pupils study Christianity alongside another major religion and comparisons are made between the two. The curriculum leader for RE has a clear intent for the RE curriculum saying '*It is based on debating the big questions in life and exploring concepts that connect different religious faiths and how this impacts on our lives, leading to deeper and more memorable learning*'. She has evaluated the curriculum provision accurately, identifying strengths and areas for development. In light of this some changes have been made to ensure the curriculum is appropriately sequenced and builds from prior learning. These changes have now been implemented and teachers supported to ensure clarity and consistency in terms of the curriculum intent and its implementation. Her comment that '*we were aware that some of the building blocks weren't there which has led to us improving on what was already in place and breaking down the learning to show those steps in progression*' shows just how much she has thought about the sequencing of learning as pupils progress through the school.

Evidence from lesson visits and walking around the school confirms how the vision of the school is lived through what the school calls its 'Christian values'. There is a focus on there being a distinctiveness about the vision and values at St Catherine's that takes into account the school's Christian ethos and the context of the school community. Visits to the local church are a regular part of life at St Catherine's, and the impact of this has been that more of the local community now attend church. Parent voice confirms that parents feel more comfortable with attending church and school events. These events include spiritual awareness week, multi-faith week, an open day at Easter, environmental awareness week, choir performances, as well as the three standard church visits each year at Christmas, Easter and the Year 6 leavers' assembly.

There are clear links between the RE curriculum and other curriculum areas including personal, social, emotional and health education, philosophy, faith stories in English and a recognition that not belonging to a faith does not mean that one cannot have morals or values. Classroom reflection areas were very inclusive and just as accessible for pupils with no religious faith as for those with a faith. There was consistent recognition and understanding from everyone spoken to that morals and values are something that everyone, regardless of whether they are religious or secular, can identify with.

There is an emphasis on ensuring that the curriculum for RE is creative and that pupils experience things first hand as much as possible to ensure learning is memorable. For example, as part of multi-faith week, pupils in nursery and reception had the opportunity to learn Hindu dancing, pupils in Year 5 visited both St Mary's church and the Church of the Twelve Apostles and then compared the architecture of the two churches as well as discussing how holy communion and the Eucharist in the two churches were similar or different. Year 6 pupils spent the day at the Bedford multi-faith park. Evidence from walking around the school showed how pupils are given opportunities for rich and memorable learning taking full advantage of the local area.

Leaders are thoughtful, reflective and are strongly committed to the school's values. The curriculum lead for RE described a collaborative, whole school approach to curriculum development with clear responsibilities for individual subject leaders. She showed passion and commitment to her subject and was able to talk about how she has mapped the progression of curriculum skills for RE across the school. In addition, she has a good understanding of how assessment works in RE and was able to talk clearly about her monitoring role and the impact it has, including subsequent actions to further improve the provision. For example, pupil voice recently undertaken showed how pupils found it challenging to comment on the question, 'what kind of important questions might you ask in RE'? As a result of this, plans have been put in place to focus more on discussing the big questions and facilitating for pupils to explore questions in more depth. During visits to the Year 6 classes, this was enacted with pupils exploring the question, '*What does Christmas mean to you and is Christmas just for Christians?*' A high quality discussion was taking place where pupils were exploring the concept of whether Christmas is just a religious event or whether it is cultural too. In addition, in all classes visited, reflection areas encouraged pupils to reflect on significant questions such as: 'Is it easier to be loved or to love?'; 'What might God want to say to the human race?'; 'Where is God? Is he inside the heart or beyond the world?' All reflection areas had books for pupils to write their own thoughts, prayers or inspirational quotes and pupils spoke very positively about this.

In lessons and discussions, pupils show high levels of respect for each other and for adults. They presented as keen, motivated learners and actively collaborated to support and help each other. They welcomed questions and challenge and were eager to discuss their learning with adults. They were able to articulate their learning very well and supported each other when explaining the learning in a group. Many pupils in Year 6 were able to not only recall their current term's learning but also learning from Year 4 when they studied the Hindu religion. They were less confident when asked to talk about learning in Year 5 when, alongside Christianity they learned about Judaism. The curriculum lead for RE reflected how this might be because of the similarities between Judaism and Christianity and pupils not remembering what distinguishes Judaism from Christianity. She also discussed how learning from stories when learning about Hinduism had possibly helped pupils to know more and remember more.

Support for pupils working below age related expectations was evident in the lessons visited. Sentence prompts and word banks were provided to support with writing. In addition, one group of pupils was working with the teaching assistant discussing the learning further and then co-constructing the writing between them with the teaching assistant modelling the writing. Equally, opportunities for pupils to extend their learning were evident. For example, in one Year 6 class, pupils were encouraged to challenge themselves by including relevant quotes from the bible to support their writing.

Links with other faiths and the idea of key concepts running through the RE curriculum was evident in the planning but also enacted in the classroom. For example, in one Year 6 class, pupils were not sure of what the word 'Emanuel' meant. The teacher referred to it as 'new vocabulary' and then went on to explain very clearly its meaning, 'God is with us'. She then linked it with the word 'Allah' from the Muslim faith, 'God is great'.

The learning environment both in classrooms and in communal areas around the school celebrated diversity, the importance of reflection, the big questions about life and our place in the world, religious festivals from all the major religions and our multicultural society. In the hall, every year group had created a collaborative display of the religion they studied in particular and all the major world religions were represented through beautiful and inspiring art work. A 'Gate of heaven' display, with a seat for quiet reflection, had been created by Year 5 as part of the school's involvement in a flower festival at the local church.

The local vicar, who is also a governor of the school, takes assemblies regularly and on the morning of the visit, the whole school was taking part in an assembly on the theme of advent led by the vicar. Children listened attentively and enjoyed creating the nativity scene on the stage as well as learning a

simple prayer which they sang. Pupils' behaviour was exemplary and all children from the very youngest to those in Year 6 were engaged and reflective.

Actions agreed / recommendations: (identify by whom and timescale):

- Consider how to ensure that all learning is embedded in long term memory.
- Continue to embed the excellent practice in RE and use the systems and structures already developed for the RE curriculum to support curriculum development in other foundation subjects that are less well developed (by July 2020).

Report to be copied to:

Tania Rawle – HCC Head of School Standards and Accountability

Simon Newlands – HCC Operations Director, Education, Children's Services

Tracy Warner – HfL Education Services Director, Primary

Catherine Tallis – HfL Business Services Director

Anne Peck – HfL Regional Lead East District School Effectiveness Adviser: Stevenage

Name of consultant	Kate Beaumont	Subject	Curriculum
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