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Ms C Hoddinott
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hoddinott

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 November 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of three lessons, one of which was a sixth form lesson taught in a partner school.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- The standards attained by the students by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are at least in line with expectations and students' achievement is good. Most students acquire a broad understanding of the key features of religions they have studied.
- Students ably apply their skills to challenging tasks and clearly demonstrate their ability to analyse belief and evaluate how religion impacts on the life of those who adhere to religious faith. Students' ability to reflect on, and evaluate their own findings and views, is underdeveloped.

- A very small number of students have opted into AS- and A-Level courses in the sixth form. Over recent years students have attained above-average results and their progress is good.
- Students' personal development in the context of RE is very good. They value opportunities to discuss and explore religious and moral issues. The subject makes a very good impact on their spiritual and cultural development. Students comment very positively on how RE, and more widely, the school's provision for community cohesion, promote respect for different opinions and religious and cultural diversity. Students' behaviour in the lessons observed was outstanding.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Teaching is lively and well-organised. Some outstanding features include a use of very good strategies and resources to engage and challenge students, including the more able. Students very much enjoy working in pairs and small groups and show initiative in their work when learning is enquiry based.
- A strong aspect of teaching is the focus on the development of students' interpretation and evaluation skills when researching religion and belief. Students' responses are suitably varied and often presented in creative ways, using a wide range of media, including information and communication technology.
- Insufficient opportunities exist for teachers to develop their subject confidence and, as a result, the potential to extend students' depth of understanding of religious material is not always fully maximised. The provision of consistent opportunities for students to reflect on issues of meaning and purpose, is underdeveloped.
- Assessment is a growing strength. Suitable use of peer- and self-assessment helps to provide students with a clear picture of the progress they are making. Assessment tasks are generally challenging. End-of-unit tests enable students to demonstrate their attainment and progress. Teachers' marking is usually helpful in identifying how students can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The personal development curriculum, which includes RE, seeks to be innovative, building on a well-established Year 7 enquiry-based learning programme. There is a clear mapping of provision at Key Stages 3 and 4 to take account of the recently published agreed syllabus. Plans to enhance provision through 'immersion days' and blocked weeks build on successful existing practice.

- Curriculum planning ensures that there is sound progression in students' learning and in the development of their skills. However, the selection and sequencing of work is not fully developed to ensure continuity and progression in the students' learning about, and from, religion and belief.
- Opportunities for students to engage with visitors from a wide range of religious and belief communities are good, as is the impact on students' appreciation of diversity through the department's link with another, more ethnically diverse school. The school's promotion of community cohesion is having a good and increasing impact on the RE curriculum. Students have good opportunities to visit different places of worship and engage with speakers from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Curriculum provision in the sixth form broadly meets the expectations set out in the Worcestershire agreed syllabus.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- A new subject leader was appointed to the post just over a year ago to consolidate and build on changes to RE within an integrated provision. There is a good sense of teamworking in the department and enthusiasm for teaching RE, very ably supported by the senior leadership team.
- Strengths and weaknesses in the subject are accurately identified through careful evaluation and line management procedures. Effective use is made of reviews and student feedback to inform improvement planning.
- RE makes a very strong contribution to the wider school approach to promoting community cohesion, particularly through the bridges it has built with members of religious communities locally and internationally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills of evaluating religion and belief through their own reflections
- providing training opportunities for non-specialist teachers to enhance their subject confidence and ensuring that this leads to students' higher achievement.

I hope that 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. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector