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4 October 2010

Mrs M Bailey
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bailey

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 23 September 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included observation of two lessons, curriculum planning, interviews with staff and students, and scrutiny of assessment records.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Results in the short GCSE course are well above average. The proportion of students reaching the highest A*/A grades in 2010 was in line with that found nationally but was exceptionally high in 2009. Students use a range of evidence and examples to justify their own ideas while providing an evaluation of others' perspectives. In lessons, however, students are less adept at using the more critical thinking skills required in the study of RE.
- Achievement at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Students attain standards that are in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Progress that students make across various elements of the subject is uneven. This

is because the learning is very focused on content and does not support the effective integration of the two areas of attainment: 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. In particular, some activities related to 'learning about' religion, lack depth and students do not extend their subject-specific skills of enquiry to assess the impact of religious beliefs on the lives of the faith community they are studying.

- RE makes a positive contribution towards students' personal development, particularly at Key Stage 4. It encourages students to take matters of faith and religion seriously and to respect others' views. Students' attitudes towards the subject are good. They are clear that the subject provides good opportunities for them to articulate their own ideas, to express opinions, and to learn to respect the views of others.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Teaching incorporates many positive features including: the effective management of behaviour; very positive relationships with students; the use of well-structured lessons and resources; and, a dedicated commitment to the subject. In the best instances, these features combine well to secure well-managed lessons resulting in good learning and progress.
- Thoughtful work has been undertaken to develop the pattern of assessment in RE. Structured, manageable and levelled assessment tasks are in place. However, as yet judgements are not reliable or robust enough, particularly in Key Stage 3 because assessments do not relate clearly enough to the pattern of progression outlined in the locally agreed syllabus. Although marking is regular, it does not consistently give precise advice to the students on how to improve their work. As a result, students do not always understand the use of levels or how they relate to the assessments.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- A priority for the department is the establishment of a curriculum in Key Stage 3 that systematically teaches and develops the skills of investigation and enquiry. The school is aware that it needs to do more to ensure that challenge, progression and continuity are built into students' learning. Limited use is made of levels in planning learning outcomes. Individual units do not always ensure a clear process of enquiry running through the work or provide for the structured development of skills. While some units challenge students' thinking, others overemphasise low-level collection of information about religion.
- RE makes a sound contribution to the school's promotion of community cohesion. The department places appropriate emphasis on enabling the

students to understand the significance of religion and its forms of expression in people's lives. Students spoke of their enthusiasm for out-of-school learning in RE and hoped that they might have opportunities to visit a wider range of places of worship within the local area and beyond.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory with good features.

- Leadership of RE is well established with a drive for improvement and a strong sense of direction. The subject has received strong support from the senior leadership team. All aspects of the work of the department are driven by a shared commitment to high standards and the enrichment of students' wider personal development.
- Effective strategies are in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision. A well-focused improvement plan for the subject is in place with a set of clear and appropriate priorities targeted on improving provision and raising standards. Based on the successful impact of actions so far, the subject has good capacity to improve. A sound subject evaluation was produced to support the visit with an accurate evaluation of the subject's current position within the school.
- The arrangements for assessing students' progress are satisfactory with appropriate use of the analysis of assessment data to evaluate their achievement. However, the tracking of the progress made by different groups of students within each strand of the subject over time is less well developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing a clearer focus on the key skills and concepts of the subject in planning the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

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 published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to SACRE and your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector