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22 October 2010

Dr R Tetlow
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Dear Dr Tetlow

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 11 and 12 October 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: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with some good features and good capacity for improvement.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- The standards gained by students at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus and students' achievement is satisfactory. Most students acquire a broad understanding of the key features of the religions they have studied. However, they are less secure in their knowledge when comparing aspects of beliefs and practices between and within religions.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is rising, as indicated by the short course GCSE results in 2010. The proportion of students who attained A*

to C grades was just above the national average. Students make sound progress in their learning and enjoy responding to religious and ethical issues in an informed way. When given the opportunity, students can link their study of religion and belief to their exploration of more personal reflections and are able to express their own insights thoughtfully.

- A small number of students have opted for an AS-level course in the sixth form, reflecting the growing popularity of the subject.
- Students are more effective learners when they are involved fully, for example, in following a line of enquiry using skills of analysis, evaluation and reflection.
- Students' personal development is good. They know the importance of understanding religious and cultural diversity in the British society and globally. Students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning, in the lessons observed, were good.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory with a number of good features.

- A positive ethos for learning is well established and lesson objectives are explained well. A variety of tasks and teachers' questioning help to probe and extend students' knowledge and understanding. Tasks are often devised so that they are matched well to students' different needs.
- A good range of teaching strategies, such as structured pair and small group work, is used which ensures that students are actively engaged in learning.
- There are some gaps in teachers' subject expertise and, as a result, the potential to extend students' depth of understanding of religious material is not always realised fully.
- Assessment is a growing strength. Suitable use of peer- and self-assessment helps students to have a clear picture of their progress. Assessment tasks are generally challenging and 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 satisfactory.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 has been significantly reshaped in line with the revised agreed syllabus. The schemes of work are formulated so that they better meet students' needs and enable them to study religion and its impact in modern society. There are some challenging units for example, 'Dangerous RE' in Year 8, which gives students opportunities to reflect on the challenges presented by religion and belief in the modern world. Although much of the curriculum is new at this key stage, it has good potential to improve students' achievement.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is planned well and all students can certify their learning through the GCSE short course. A small number of students study for the full course, mostly in their own time, and are well supported by teachers. Curriculum provision in the sixth form is limited to AS level.
- Curriculum planning ensures sound progression in students' learning and in developing their skills.
- Opportunities for students to engage with visitors from a wide range of religious and belief communities are limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory with good capacity to improve.

- A new specialist subject leader was appointed just over a year ago. The impact of actions taken so far is evident in raising the students' levels of enjoyment and their motivation to achieve.
- Another important outcome is the establishment of clear structures to promote effective teaching through a revised curriculum and assessment arrangements, including moderating judgements about students' attainment and progress.
- Strengths and areas for improvement have been accurately identified and good plans put into place to drive improvement. A measure of success is already evident in the 2010 GCSE results.
- Non-specialist staff are supported well and they appreciate the subject leader's enthusiasm. Senior leaders recognise that non-specialist teachers need training opportunities to enhance their subject expertise.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing training opportunities for non-specialist teachers to enhance their subject expertise so that this leads to students' higher achievement
- extending the opportunities for students to have first-hand experience of members of religious communities through, for example, contact with visiting speakers.

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