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Mr J Morris
Principal
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Dear Mr Morris

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 26 and 27 January 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 students and staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with good features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly in line with the expectations set out in the Leicester City agreed syllabus. This represents good progress from students' low levels of attainment on entry. A significant proportion of students who join the school at different times in the year also make good progress because of the support they receive. Overall, students have a good grasp of the significance which religion and belief plays in people's lives. They talk knowledgeably about some of the deeper questions of life, such as the existence of good and evil. They can also identify shared messages expressed in the moral teachings of religions that they have studied.

- Weaknesses in provision in Years 10 and 11 are being resolved successfully so that students' achievement is satisfactory. Very few students have opted to take the GCSE examination in the past and results have been below average. However, with stronger provision now, senior leaders expect at least half of the current Year 11 students to take the short course GCSE examination in the summer term 2011, and the great majority of them to do so in the following academic year.
- Students at both key stages enjoy the subject and can explain its value well. Students express their own views thoughtfully in response to what they learn about religions and belief but their use of technical language and extended vocabulary is underdeveloped. Students are able to apply a sound range of skills in their studies, for example analysis, interpretation and evaluation. However, students' skills of independent investigation are less well developed.
- RE makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. Students are very aware of the importance of understanding religious, social and cultural diversity found in the school and in the wider world. The subject makes a particularly useful contribution to students' moral development. Students comment strongly on the subject's promotion of respect for different opinions and the value of diversity. This also reflects the positive contribution that the faculty makes to community cohesion, for example, through the unit on 'What will make Leicester a more respectful City?'

Quality of teaching of RE

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

- Typically, teaching is structured with purposeful tasks to get lessons off to a good start. Lesson objectives are explained well so that students have a clear idea of learning outcomes.
- In the most successful lessons, a good range of activities and methods is used to promote good progress. For example, a Year 9 lesson explored Christian teachings about morality using the gospel story of the Good Samaritan. Close attention was paid to developing students' literacy skills as well as their understanding of the significance of Jesus' teaching at a number of levels, including personal application, in a modern world. Effective teaching enabled students to show a high degree of cooperation through pair, group and independent work. Assessment techniques during, and towards the end of the lesson, gave a good understanding of progress for both the teacher and the students.
- A reasonably broad range of resources is used to enliven learning, including artefacts, information and communication technology and adapted worksheets which students of different abilities can access.
- In lessons where students do not make faster progress it is because insufficient use is made of more active learning methods, particularly those which promote students' enquiry and investigative skills.

- Assessment procedures are satisfactory. End-of-unit assessment tasks enable students to show their attainment and progress. Some effective use is made of peer- and self-assessment which students value. Teachers' marking of assessment tasks is helpful and students usually have a sound grasp of how to improve their work.
- Teachers calibrate their judgements through the moderation of students' work and there is a growing understanding of the criteria used to form judgements. Leaders recognise the need to develop assessment tasks further so that they take full account of students' different abilities. Currently, a portfolio of students' work showing a range of levels of attainment is not collected. This limits teachers' access to exemplar material to support the reliability of their assessments.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision in Years 10 and 11 is being strengthened through a wider access to examination courses. Its effectiveness, in terms of outcomes as measured by GCSE results, remains to be fully demonstrated. However, students receive a broadly wide experience covering different religions and beliefs linked to a study of moral and social issues.
- The agreed syllabus informs the development of schemes of work at Key Stage 3 where statutory requirements are met.
- The balance between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion is satisfactory, although students' responses to the latter attainment target are less well developed.
- The provision is supported well through a range of visitors and visits, including links with schools in the locality which have students from different religious backgrounds.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

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

- The subject is integrated with the humanities faculty which is led and managed well. The subject leader has a clear rationale for further improvement, particularly in Years 10 and 11. However, the impact of improvements put in place has yet to be fully realised.
- The good sense of team working in the faculty and enthusiasm for teaching RE is very ably supported by the senior leadership team.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, based on the monitoring of provision and the quality of students' work. The subject leader keeps abreast of developments in the subject by attending a local forum for subject leaders, organised by the local authority. Learning gained from these meetings is disseminated to others in the faculty.

- Opportunities for teachers to develop their subject expertise are insufficient and, as a result, the potential to extend students' depth of understanding of religious material is not always maximised.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- embedding the Key Stage 4 curriculum and ensuring that it leads to students' good or better achievement
- developing a portfolio of students' work to support teachers' assessment procedures
- providing training opportunities for non-specialist teachers to enhance their subject expertise, so that students' learning is maximised through the use of a broader range of skills, including those of investigation and enquiry.

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