

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr E Lumley
Headteacher
Park High School
Thistlecroft Gardens
Stanmore
HA7 1PL

Dear Mr Lumley

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 9 and 10 March 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.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly in line with the expectations set out in the Harrow agreed syllabus. From their attainment on entry, this represents at least satisfactory progress for the great majority of students, with a significant number making good progress by the end of Year 9. Overall, students have a good grasp of the significance which religion and belief play in people's lives and how students might apply the learning for themselves. For example, in a lesson on promoting students' understanding of spirituality, they considered the role of mandalas as a tool for meditation in Buddhist traditions and also reflected on how the learning might have significance in their own lives.

- There is a strong trend of improvement. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average. Almost all students are entered for the GCSE short course examination and consistently attain A* to C grades that are considerably higher than national averages. In 2010, the proportion that attained the highest A* or A grades was significantly above average. A small number of students take the full course examination and their results are also well above those attained nationally. By the end of Year 11, achievement is good for all students, with some making exceptional progress. Students can explain the role and impact of religion in contemporary society confidently and are able to evaluate different viewpoints from religious and other belief perspectives, with discernment and maturity.
- A small, but growing number of students choose AS and A-level studies in the sixth form. In 2010, students attained above average results in these examinations. The results represent good progress. Students are particularly adept at using analytical and evaluative skills and have plenty of opportunities to develop their independent learning skills.
- Students across the school, including in the sixth form, enjoy the subject very much and can explain its value well. Students express their own views thoughtfully in response to what they learn about religions and belief. The department regularly seeks students' views about their learning and this helps the subject to respond to any shortcomings that are identified.
- RE makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. They behave well in lessons and are very aware of the importance of understanding the religious, social and cultural diversity found in the school and in the wider world. Students comment strongly on the subject's promotion of respect for different opinions and the value of diversity.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teachers have very good subject expertise which they use skilfully to probe students' knowledge, thereby deepening students' understanding of religion and belief.
- A wide range of activities and tasks enables students to participate actively in learning. In all the lessons observed, the interactive whiteboard was used purposefully to enliven learning. Other strategies, such as creating posters, making models of places of worship, debates and discussions, help to challenge students and to learn in different ways, including in the lessons in the sixth form. They also enable students to develop a broad range of skills.
- 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. Checks on learning during the lesson ensure that students make the expected progress. Tasks are varied to

include a mix of pair, group and individual work, resulting in an effective use of time, although occasionally exploration of issues in greater depth is not possible in the time available.

- Assessment procedures are good. End-of-unit assessment tasks enable students to show their attainment and progress. Students value the use of peer- and self-assessment which are most effective when they clearly understand the level descriptors which are adapted well in assessment tasks. Assessment in Years 10 and 11 is particularly helpful to students when the mark scheme is explained well, along with teachers' good modelling of responses in relation to examination questions. Teachers' marking of work is usually detailed and students have a good grasp of how to improve their work. The quality of essay marking in the sixth-form studies is particularly impressive. The monitoring of students' progress enables teachers to identify underachievement and take effective action.
- Teachers calibrate their judgements through the moderation of students' work. Currently, a portfolio of students' work at Key Stage 3, showing a range of levels of attainment, is not routinely 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 good.

- A new scheme for learning for Year 7 students is suitably planned around developing their personal, learning and thinking skills in the context of religion and belief, including those practised in the local area. Schemes identify what is to be studied and how learning will take place in sufficient detail to enable teachers to plan individual lessons effectively. The units of work benefit students particularly well because lessons have a line of enquiry and learning outcomes are clearly shared.
- The provision of accredited courses in Years 10 and 11 is good and work for these students is also planned well. An opportunity to offer the full course at GCSE from September 2011 is judged well.
- Provision in the sixth form is limited mostly to examination courses, but the school is keen to extend it to include conferences and days dedicated to an exploration of religion and belief.
- Students appreciate a chance to visit a synagogue and experience meeting some holocaust survivors. This enhances students' understanding and personal development. However, they have fewer opportunities to engage with speakers from a wider range of religions and belief, for example through visiting places of worship.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The subject is integrated into a humanities faculty. The subject leader is enthusiastic and keen to innovate to keep students interested and challenged. A growing number are opting into further studies in the sixth form, as well as volunteering to work for the full course at GCSE level.
- The department has a good sense of team-working and enthusiasm for teaching RE, and is very ably supported by the senior leadership team.
- Strengths and areas for improvement in the subject are accurately identified through careful evaluation, reflecting the impact of the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.
- Opportunities to further develop teachers' skills are taken when offered, for example, with regard to syllabus changes at GCSE level, so that standards are sustained.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a portfolio of students' work at Key Stage 3 to support teachers' assessment procedures
- extending opportunities for students to have first-hand experience of religious and other belief communities, through, for example, the use of fieldwork and visitors.

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