

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



28 March 2011

Mr M Williams  
Headteacher  
The Corsham School  
The Tynings  
Corsham  
Wiltshire  
SN13 9DF

Dear Mr Williams

### **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 8 and 9 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good with some outstanding features.

#### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is good with some outstanding elements.

- In 2010, GCSE results were average overall. Learning and progress are good. The achievement of those students taking AS or A Level is outstanding.
- Students in Key Stage 3 achieve well in most aspects of the subject. They use a wide range of specialist vocabulary and understand how religions have an impact on individuals and communities. They can distinguish between forms of religious and spiritual expression in different religions, for example, in Christian and Islamic art. When given the opportunity students analyse similarities and differences between religions.
- Students in Key Stage 4 develop well the ability to interpret sources and arguments and can explain clearly the ways in which faith traditions draw

on their religious texts and teachings to answer questions of a spiritual and moral nature.

- At all levels, students develop the ability to interpret and evaluate, although sometimes the scope to develop higher-order skills is limited by an emphasis on description and straightforward explanation.
- When opportunities arise, students demonstrate originality, imagination and creativity in their RE, in keeping with one of the school specialisms. An outstanding achievement was the creation, with the help of a resident artist, of an impressive Buddha figure overlooking the inter-faith peace garden, which is used for meditation. Students sometimes take the initiative in producing, directing, filming and acting in films related to aspects of the RE course. For example, sixth-form students are creating 'Buddhist TV'.
- At all stages, students benefit spiritually and morally from regular opportunities to reflect on what they have learnt in RE and to consider their own beliefs and opinions.
- Students enjoy RE and can explain its value. In lessons, they are quiet and attentive. The subject makes an outstanding contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Quality of teaching of RE**

The quality of teaching of RE is good overall.

- Teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and outstanding in the sixth form. Teachers are committed to their subject and communicate their enthusiasm to students.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which leads to confident teaching. The structure of each lesson is explained carefully to students at the onset. Teachers have excellent questioning skills, give clear explanations and provide good support to students as they complete tasks. Teachers set some imaginative tasks, for example 'to create a facebook page for the Buddha'. Homework is set and checked regularly.
- In accordance with school policy, students have opportunities to use the 'making room' in connection with their RE studies. Year 7 students work with artists in residence to produce Ramayana masks and students from Year 8 produce displays of Christian and Islamic art.
- Assessment is integral to lessons and is informative and purposeful, taking up minimal time by using simple strategies involving the use of coloured cards and individual whiteboards. Self- and peer-assessment are regular features of lessons, and students are challenged to identify ways in which they can improve their work.
- The department has a good collection of resources that is used creatively in lessons. Films and photographs are used as stimuli for students to ask questions and draw conclusions. Good use is made of case studies to interest and challenge students; for example, Year 11 students investigate cases tried by Shari'ah law. Good use is made of passages from the Qur'an

to enable students to understand the significance of the practice of Zakat. Excellent use is made of the school's electronic learning environment to support learning.

- During lessons, students are given opportunities to reflect on their learning and consider their own responses to issues they are studying, for example, attitudes to begging.
- Despite its many strengths, there are aspects of the teaching which could be improved. For example, opportunities are missed for students to broaden their understanding of features of religion shared by many faiths, such as fasting. The predominance of whole-class discussion in the lessons observed limited the number of students who could actively participate.
- Learning objectives are explained clearly, although while they are differentiated by a hierarchy of skills, these do not always reflect clearly the attainment targets for RE. Learning does not always build effectively on prior learning and occasionally more able students do not have enough opportunities to work in depth at higher levels.

### **Quality of the curriculum in RE**

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- RE is a valued subject in the school curriculum, particularly for its contribution to students' appreciation of a range of faiths in this largely monocultural area. The school leadership supports the department's choice of Islam as a GCSE paper, recognising the challenge in that option.
- The department's choice to teach mainly a single religion at a time gives students a depth of understanding, although they sometimes lack opportunities to understand features of religions that are found in different forms across many faiths.
- The school is committed to giving all students an opportunity to gain a GCSE in religious studies and the current provision at Key Stage 4 meets the needs of students of all abilities.
- The department has forged links with local Christian communities and is developing links with other faith communities so that students can learn directly about the religions they are studying.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE**

Leadership and management in RE are good.

- The department benefits from strong leadership and management from the head of faculty who sets a positive example through her rigorous and dynamic teaching. There is a strong sense of commitment throughout the department and staff have opportunities to share good practice.
- Subject reviews, self-evaluation and improvement planning are clearly focused on raising standards at GCSE and improving the provision for the subject. The regularity, rigour and quality of subject reviews are good.

- Provision meets all legal requirements and RE makes a good contribution to community cohesion.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- embedding the attainment targets for RE more clearly in lesson planning
- giving students, particularly the more able, opportunities to work in depth at higher levels.

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

**Barbara Wintersgill**  
**Additional Inspector**