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Mr S Rees
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rees

Ofsted 2011–12 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 17 and 18 May 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, including the school governor with responsibility for RE, and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory although there are significant shortcomings in Key Stage 4 provision.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards of the small group of students entered for full course GCSE in 2010 are average with results in line with the national average. Overall, students made satisfactory progress against targets although some individuals underachieved.
- Students at Key Stage 4 are not making sufficient progress. Significant limitations in provision mean that the majority of students have little knowledge or understanding of religious beliefs and practice. While

students make some progress in individual lessons against learning objectives set, targets are not set to enable students to make progress.

- Key Stage 3 school assessments indicate that attainment is in line with expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Students are making satisfactory progress. They can link the study of religion to their own ideas about questions of meaning and purpose. For example, Year 9 students showed clear understanding of philosophical ideas in Buddhism and evaluated their significance for themselves and others.
- Students are generally interested in RE. They appreciate how RE helps them to explore their own and others' beliefs and views. Students can see the value of RE in terms of respecting diversity, although they are aware that opportunities to meet faith members are very limited.
- RE makes a contribution to students' moral development at Key Stage 4 where there are opportunities to discuss ethical issues. Students' spiritual development is enhanced at Key Stage 3 through personal reflection of religious ideas and beliefs. Opportunities to contribute to the promotion of cultural development are more limited.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory.

- Lessons are orderly and teaching generally proceeds at a good pace. Relationships with students are positive. Stimulating resources are used to engage and motivate students. Teaching is most effective when students are given a variety of challenging activities that develop the skills of reflection and evaluation. Good use is made of creative approaches that enable students to develop and consolidate learning.
- In some Key Stage 3 lessons, students are given different tasks according to their ability. Generally, however, students use the same workbooks and complete the same tasks whatever their ability. Some tasks set are not sufficiently challenging for the age and ability of students. As a result, progress is hampered.
- Planning at Key Stage 4 does not ensure appropriate challenge. Learning is disjointed with little opportunity for students to develop depth of knowledge and understanding.
- Work is marked regularly and in detail at Key Stage 3. As a result, students know how to improve their work. Level criteria for setting tasks are used accurately by teachers although some marking is over-generous. Work is not marked at Key Stage 4. As a result, students have no understanding of what progress they make in RE.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory but there are significant limitations in the provision at Key Stage 4.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum meets the broad statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Students are given the opportunity to develop knowledge of a range of religious traditions and philosophical ideas. Links are made to other curriculum areas to promote students' engagement and learning. However, the opportunity to develop learning through engagement with faith communities is limited. As a result, students have little scope to explore understanding and diversity of religions and beliefs in a local and national context.
- Key Stage 4 provision does not fully meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The compulsory course for all students is not based on an accredited course and is predominantly based on moral issues and students' own personal reflection and development. It lacks rigour and students' work is not assessed. This is hampering students' progress. As a result, students are unable to develop appropriate knowledge of religious teachings and understanding of the impact of religious beliefs on individuals and communities. While a few students took the GCSE full course in 2010, none of the current students has opted to follow the course.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The RE coordinator is committed to the subject. She has incorporated whole-school initiatives within departmental practices to bring about improvement. For example, differentiated task sheets have been developed that enable students to understand how to make progress.
- Non-specialist teachers have been well supported by the coordinator through individual meetings and detailed planning. A common purpose is shared among those teaching RE but opportunities to share practice and contribute to bringing about improvement are limited.
- The subject is monitored and some priorities accurately identified by subject and senior leaders. This has not, however, always led to specific actions for improvement.
- Leaders are generally aware of current developments in the subject. There are some instances where leaders do not demonstrate understanding of statutory requirements. For example, there is a lack of clarity about the agreed syllabus requirements for Key Stage 4.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- revising curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 to ensure agreed syllabus requirements are fully met and opportunities for external accreditation are developed
- ensuring pupils can make progress at Key Stage 4 through the setting of appropriate work, target monitoring and assessment

- ensuring greater opportunities among the RE team for subject professional development and sharing of good practice
- providing opportunities for students to have first-hand experience of faith members and communities.

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

Isobel Short
Additional Inspector