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Mr A Fuller  
Headteacher  
Joseph Swan School  
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Dear Mr Fuller

### **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 14 and 15 June 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, one member of the governing body and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 are broadly average although the pattern of attainment over the past three years is inconsistent. Results in 2010 were in line with the national average. Current assessments indicate that students are making satisfactory progress. Students are able to discuss and evaluate a range of ethical issues and religious perspectives. However, their understanding of religious beliefs is more limited.
- Year 9 school assessments indicate that attainment is average. Students make satisfactory progress and demonstrate a sound understanding of a range of religious practices and beliefs. Students' progress is hampered by the lack of appropriately challenging activities in some lessons.

- Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour are generally good. They can see the value of the subject, especially in helping them to develop their own views on ethical issues. RE makes a good contribution to moral and cultural development but opportunities to contribute to spiritual development are restricted. For example, students only demonstrated a limited understanding about questions of meaning and truth.

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

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching is uneven. In the best practice, lessons are well planned to enable the active engagement of students. Resources are varied and appropriate and are used to challenge and motivate students. Teaching models an investigative approach to learning with students using a variety of sources to develop understanding. Opportunities are given for students to discuss views, especially at Key Stage 4. Students' progress is checked throughout the lesson and learning adapted where necessary.
- Where teaching is less effective, activities do not enable students to develop appropriate knowledge and understanding as indicated in the lesson objectives. For example, students are asked to produce summary work on the purposes of Christian marriage before they have learnt what these are. At Key Stage 4, challenging written work is not used sufficiently to help consolidate learning.
- Work is marked regularly. At Key Stage 4, teachers' comments help students know how to improve their work. At Key Stage 3, comments generally focus on effort and presentation. As a result, students have little understanding of how to make progress. Teachers often use levels inaccurately when setting and marking assessment tasks.

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

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject broadly meets the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus at Key Stages 3 and 4. However, overall curriculum planning lacks a clear rationale. There is no provision for RE in the sixth form.
- Students follow full course RE at Key Stage 4 and have the opportunity to be accredited, but the numbers of students who opt for external entry remains low. The school has entered a small number of students for full course at the end of Year 9. While students have shown commitment to this after-school course there is no clear pathway for these students to continue and progress in RE. These students currently do not receive their entitlement to RE at Key Stage 4 as they follow an alternative key skills course.
- At Key Stage 3, students are given the opportunity to develop appropriate knowledge and understanding of religious practices and local religious communities. The scope to develop understanding of ethical and

philosophical ideas is, however, very limited. As a result, there is little continuity and progression between Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Some opportunities are given to enrich learning through visitors to school from local faith communities. As a result, students have gained some understanding of the diversity of religious traditions in the local area and the impact of faith on believers. The opportunity to visit local places of worship is, however, underdeveloped.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The head of department is aware of current developments in the subject. He can articulate a vision for the subject although there is a lack of clarity across leadership about the distinctive nature and purpose of the subject. Statutory requirements are not fully understood.
- Monitoring and evaluative procedures are used well to identify areas for improvement. A clear process of regular subject reviews is in place with a senior leader and link governor supporting and challenging leadership within the department. Improvement planning does not always, however, focus on key priorities and ensure that specific actions are identified. For example, data on students' performance is not used to identify specific intervention strategies to ensure that all students make good progress.
- Teachers of RE share a common purpose and work together to develop schemes of work and engaging teaching activities. The department reflects wider whole-school priorities and contributes to cross-curricular initiatives; for example, departmental members support the Multicultural Week.
- Accommodation and resources for the subject are satisfactory although there is little use of information and communication technology in RE to develop engaging learning. Opportunities for subject-specific training are limited.

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

- establishing a clear rationale for the RE curriculum across the school which will meet the needs of all students
- ensuring that statutory requirements are met for all students in the sixth form
- developing strategies for consolidation of learning at Key Stage 4
- developing assessment and marking practices that enable students to understand how to make progress.

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 published on the Ofsted website and will be sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about

any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Isobel Short**  
**Additional Inspector**