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11 July 2011

Mr D O'Sullivan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Sullivan

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 28 and 29 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 and students; 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.

- A small number of students were entered for the short course GCSE examination in 2009 and their results were below average. Many more students sat the examination in 2010 and all attained A* to C grades. Just over half of the cohort in Year 10 has been entered this academic year and senior leaders are confident that the upward, well above average, trend of attainment will continue. A small number of students also take the full course GCSE examination and attain results that are well above average. Overall, students' achievement is good in Key Stage 4. Students ably apply their skills to challenging tasks and clearly demonstrate their ability to analyse and evaluate religions and beliefs and how these impact on individuals and society.

- At Key Stage 3, students attain standards that are at least in line with the expectations in Hertfordshire agreed syllabus and above for some. Students make sound progress in developing their understanding of religion and belief and are able to express their own views thoughtfully in response to what they learn about, and from, religion. Higher achievement at this key stage is limited by insufficient provision in Year 9.
- The contribution of RE to students' personal development is good. The subject makes an important contribution to students' understanding and appreciation of religious and cultural diversity. Opportunities to discuss moral and ethical issues are valued by students and teaching promotes respect for different opinions and beliefs very well. Students have positive attitudes to RE and behave well in lessons, ensuring good learning.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Students enjoy and achieve in lessons that have variety and challenge routinely built into learning. Typically, teaching is lively and organised well so that students have opportunities to work collaboratively and independently.
- Active approaches to learning are established, enabling all students to participate. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on understanding how the values of equality and respect are demonstrated in a Gurdwara, students were challenged by a range of tasks that required all to contribute and show how well they had learnt through a homework task. The latter is a strong feature of teaching and extends learning gained in lessons.
- Students have a good understanding of the learning intentions and checks on the effectiveness of learning during lessons helps teaching to re-focus, ensuring that misconceptions are corrected. This was clearly evident in a Year 8 lesson on the Buddha's teaching about suffering. Formal marking of assessed tasks is detailed and enables students to have good feedback on strengths and how they can improve their work. The use of assessment statements from the agreed syllabus enables students to see how well they are progressing. The statements are being increasingly used for self- and peer-assessment purposes.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is variable but satisfactory overall.

- The curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 10 is organised well, using the agreed syllabus and GCSE examination specifications suitably in planning lessons and assessment tasks. Good attention is paid to build progressively on students' prior learning and a broad range of resources enlivens learning. There is a good balance in the range of religions and beliefs studied.
- Currently, provision in Years 9, 11 and in the sixth form does not fully meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus. There is insufficient breadth of coverage in relation to religion and belief. Senior leaders recognise

these shortcomings and have plans in place to improve curricular provision.

- There is limited enrichment in students' learning through first-hand experiences of religious and belief communities. Students expressed a desire to have more experiences as a way of improving their achievement further.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The subject leader, appointed almost a year ago, is enthusiastic and keen to innovate to keep students interested and challenged. This enthusiasm makes a significant contribution to students' success in learning and is reflected in the rapid increase in attainment in GCSE examination results. Leadership is also successful in raising the profile of RE in the school.
- Resources are organised well and used efficiently. It is recognised that more use could be made of information and communication technology in the subject.
- There is a commitment to high standards and improvement reflected in an action plan that is well considered because it identifies the right key priorities and is based on honest self-reflection. For example, priorities include using more enquiry-based approaches to learning and increasing the use of contacts with local religious and belief communities. Senior leaders share the commitment to build further on students' achievement. They provide suitable support and challenge to the subject leader and plan strategically to secure further improvement in curricular provision.
- RE makes a strong contribution to the wider school promotion of community cohesion.
- Access to a range of local and national professional development opportunities, partly for the subject leader to keep abreast of initiatives in the subject, is underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that plans to meet the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus requirements fully, including in the sixth form, are implemented effectively
- extending the opportunities that students have for first-hand contact with members of religious and belief communities through, for example, the use of more fieldwork and visitors to enrich students' learning
- ensuring that the subject leader has access to professional development to widen leadership experience in the subject.

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

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector