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Mr S Hemingway  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hemingway

### **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 4 and 5 October 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; students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is inadequate.

### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is inadequate.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 are well below average and there is a continuing pattern of low attainment over a three-year period. Results in GCSE examination courses in 2011 and previous years were well below national averages. A significant proportion of students failed to reach their targets. Progress is limited as students have insufficient opportunities to evaluate issues in depth and practise examination questions.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 are below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Students are able to work in teams, research information and present findings. However, significant weaknesses in provision mean that students do not develop a coherent understanding of religions and beliefs. Tasks lack challenge and learning is often restricted to gathering simple

information about the features of religion and completing low-level tasks. As a result, progress is inadequate.

- Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour are varied. Students generally respond well to teachers and relationships are positive. However, students are reluctant to engage in learning when tasks do not match their ability. Students can see the value of the subject especially in helping them appreciate diversity and develop respect for all. There is some disaffection among Key Stage 4 students who are not convinced of the subject's personal value to them.

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

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching is variable. In the best practice, a range of appropriate resources is used to interest and motivate students. For example, in a Year 10 lesson a news clip was used to explore conflicting views towards euthanasia. Strategies are planned which enable students to make links between their own experiences and the study of religious traditions. For example, in one Year 8 lesson students explored the impact of religious beliefs on individuals by identifying their own beliefs and subsequent actions.
- Where teaching is less effective, lessons are dominated by the teacher. Tasks are insufficiently challenging and do not develop appropriate knowledge and skills. Little opportunity is given for students to contribute ideas, ask questions and develop skills. In some lessons, planning does not structure learning effectively. Activities are disjointed and do not build on each other. As a result, students do not understand the purpose of learning and make limited progress.
- Work is marked regularly at Key Stage 4. Comments give some indication of progress and what students need to do to improve their work. In the best practice, teachers' marking gives specific advice against examination requirements, for example, 'refer to religious sources in your answer'. Assessment at Key Stage 3 is weak. Levels of attainment are used inaccurately in setting assessment tasks. Some tasks lack challenge and do not provide clear evidence of students' progress. For example, Year 8 students are required to unscramble words as part of a moderated assessment task. Marking in books does not inform students how to improve work.

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

The quality of the curriculum in RE is inadequate.

- There is no provision for RE in the sixth form.
- An important strength of the provision is the opportunity for all students to accredit their achievement at the end of Key Stage 4. A recent development is the introduction of full course GCSE for middle and higher ability students. This is raising the profile of the subject within the school.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 lacks breadth, balance and coherence. In Year 7, RE is taught as part of a 'Learning to Learn' programme. RE units of work are superficial and lack challenge. There is no continuity between Year 7 and Year 8 programmes of study. In Year 8, some links are made between humanities subjects. However, these links are not based on agreed syllabus requirements and do not develop appropriate understanding of religious beliefs and practice today. There is no use of questions to structure enquiry and no planning for the development of appropriate RE skills. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 does not provide an adequate basis for learning and progress in Key Stage 4.
- Students have some opportunities to meet members of local faith communities through the enrichment days provided across the school. Students have no other opportunities to question members of faith communities or visit places of worship.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is inadequate.

- Leaders are aware that RE has been a low priority in the school in recent times. Some improvement has been made to provision recently through the introduction of a full course at Key Stage 4. However, there is a lack of clarity across the leadership of the key priorities in the subject.
- While some monitoring of provision takes place to support the process of evaluation, this is not being used to identify specific actions for improvement within RE.
- Opportunities for the subject leader's professional development are limited. Non-specialist teachers do not have opportunities to meet together to develop understanding of RE and share good practice. As a result, teachers lack confidence and expertise to deliver RE effectively.

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

- using self-evaluation to develop specific improvement actions which are regularly reviewed and revised as appropriate
- revising the Key Stage 3 curriculum, ensuring coherence, continuity and progression for students' understanding of religions and belief
- ensuring greater challenge at Key Stage 3 through the development of appropriate teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks
- securing provision for RE for all students in the sixth form.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

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