

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



14 November 2011

Mrs F Hewardine
Headteacher
Maryhill High School
Gloucester Road
Kidsgrove
Stoke-on-Trent
ST7 4DL

Dear Mrs Hewardine

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 the 2 and 3 November 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is inadequate.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is inadequate.

- Achievement at Key Stages 4 and 5 is inadequate because curriculum provision is extremely limited. A small number of curriculum days across Key Stages 3 and 4 are set aside to focus on elements of personal and citizenship education (PACE). However, their specific RE content is limited and does not ensure that students develop an appropriate level of subject knowledge or understanding.
- Results in the GCSE full course vary year on year and in 2011 were well below the national average representing inadequate achievement by the small group of students who took the course. Evidence from lessons and students' work indicate that while students develop some understanding of a range of moral and social issues, their understanding of the religious and

ethical perspectives that they apply to these issues is often superficial and formulaic.

- Standards in RE at Key Stage 3 are below average. Students' achievement is inadequate. A significant proportion of lessons do not take sufficient account of students' different levels of knowledge and understanding. In a significant number of lessons observed, attainment was below the levels expected because teaching limited what individual students with different abilities might achieve.
- Students develop some understanding of the beliefs and practices of the major faiths and are developing their appreciation of the impact that religion has on people's way of life. Their ability to explain and analyse religion is limited. This, in part, reflects weaknesses in the provision for RE at Key Stage 3, where limited attention is being paid to the systematic development of students' knowledge and understanding of religions. As a result, students do not make enough progress in acquiring a breadth of understanding of religion and belief to match the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.
- The quality of students' personal development is variable. Many enjoy the subject and participate well.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is inadequate.

- Teaching incorporates some good features including: the effective management of behaviour; positive relationships with students; good use of resources; and, a commitment to the subject.
- Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge but the lesson activities do not always help students think about RE in ways that might build their understanding. Teachers do not consistently strike the right balance between their own input and students working independently, or give students sufficient time to develop their ideas. Much of the learning is narrowly controlled by the teacher with insufficient use being made of higher-level skills of enquiry and reflection.
- Students make most rapid progress when lessons are lively, engaging and skilfully managed, with imaginative activities, and when teachers use assessment information to define outcomes for each lesson. However, teachers pitch much of students' work at the same level of difficulty regardless of their different levels of competency. Very often students complete exactly the same work regardless of their ability set. As a result, activities do not meet the needs of different groups.
- The use of questioning is not planned in enough detail. Most questions draw short answers and do not extend learning. Students are not provided with a model on how to compose a more detailed response. Furthermore, the needs of the more able are not met with an appropriate level of challenge. This is further reason why some of the better teaching is not being translated into satisfactory overall achievement.

- Structured, manageable and levelled assessment tasks are in place. However, judgements are not reliable or robust enough, particularly in Key Stage 3, because assessments do not relate clearly enough to the pattern of progression outlined in the locally agreed syllabus.
- Students' next steps are not effectively guided by marking. Too much correction is perfunctory and unrelated to any subject-specific objectives. Even when marking gives detailed guidance, teachers do not routinely check that students understand or respond to the advice provided, and its impact is therefore limited.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is inadequate.

- Appropriate provision is made for a small group of students to accredit their learning in Key Stage 4. However, statutory requirements are not met because there is very limited RE for other Key Stage 4 students and no provision at Key Stage 5. The school has entered into a partnership agreement with three local denominational schools to provide RE for students in Key Stage 5 from September 2012.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is unbalanced, lacks coherence, rigour and progression, and is not well coordinated. Long- and medium-term planning is often unclear about the key focus, concept or question driving each topic or about the ways in which each unit builds on students' prior knowledge and understanding.
- Most students have had no significant enrichment of their learning in RE through use of fieldwork or visitors. The department has plans to introduce more visits during this academic year.
- The subject makes a sound contribution to students' moral and social development, but their spiritual development within RE is limited. Students show curiosity and insight. Many want to reflect seriously on life's fundamental questions but have limited opportunity to do so. They expressed the view that the subject is making a contribution to their understanding of diversity in the society around them.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is inadequate.

- The subject benefits from two dedicated specialist teachers and is well-resourced. The leadership of the subject is insufficiently grounded in an understanding of how to develop an appropriate approach towards the teaching of RE. Opportunities for professional development in the subject have been very limited in recent years.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improvement planning are in place. However, the effectiveness of planned actions is not evaluated against measurable outcomes or robust success criteria. In addition, it does not address the lack of provision for RE in Key Stages 4 and 5 nor does it tackle the pattern of underachievement in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that provision meets statutory requirements
- improving the overall leadership and management of RE across the school
- establishing a clearer, more coherent and progressive overall curriculum for RE
- developing more opportunities for independent learning and extending the level of challenge for the more able
- ensuring students' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to their learning about religions and beliefs are improved.

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

Jacqueline Wordsworth HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector