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Sir Mark Grundy
Executive Principal
Shireland Collegiate Academy
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Dear Sir Mark

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 14 and 15 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- While results in the examination courses at GCSE Full course and at GCE A Level are below those found nationally, they represent good achievement from the students' starting points. The strength of the students' achievement across all key stages is their ability to use higher-order thinking skills to interrogate, analyse, and evaluate religious and philosophical issues and concepts.
- Most students are able to present their ideas orally and are becoming increasingly successful in presenting cogent written arguments, particularly those who opt to take the subject at examination level. Students' progress across Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 for those students not taking the subject at GCSE is good, particularly in relation to

talking about and identifying appropriate questions to ask when investigating key religious concepts. In one Year 9 lesson, students showed a growing insight when exploring issues related to the various religious perspectives on war and in particular to the idea of pacifism. Some students became alert to the diversity of belief and religious practice within a particular religion.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge, combined with high expectations about challenging students to think. The academy has identified the shift in the level and nature of students' learning that has resulted from its innovative approach to the subject. For example, much more skilful use is being made of strategies to engage students in deeper levels of analysis, including effective use of questioning.
- Students are able to use a wide range of skills when investigating and responding to religious material. They are often involved in using critical thinking skills that require them to investigate and engage creatively with a range of concepts and ideas. Consequently, students can respond at a more personal level to the learning, asking more personal and incisive questions.
- Students develop a coherent understanding across their learning in RE. As a result, they are able to make connections between different aspects of the subject and understand the significance and impact of commitment and belief.
- Lessons are well organised with consistent lesson plan formats in all classes that are an effective guide to preparing timed activities within the three-hour lessons. All plans identify what the students are going to learn, how they are going to achieve it, and what they will be able to do to demonstrate that they have learnt effectively. Occasionally, teachers fail to distinguish clearly enough the precise level of work which individuals or small groups require, or do not allow sufficient time for a meaningful review of learning at appropriate points during the lesson to ensure that they all make good progress. Sometimes the most-able students were not always encouraged to identify and develop their own lines of enquiry.
- Satisfactory arrangements are in place to assess and record students' progress against the levels in the agreed syllabus in Years 7 and 8. The academy is currently reviewing its assessment system for students in Years 9, 10 and 11 for those students not following the GCSE option, in order for it to reflect more fully the overall assessment policy.

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is outstanding.

- The curriculum has been re-designed very skilfully to focus on the school's highly innovative competency and enquiry-based curriculum. It is based on

the identification of key concepts and questions to structure learning in RE and results in high-quality provision.

- It includes some innovative and challenging features designed to engage students' interest and ensure that the work has relevance to their lives. Many units are designed to promote higher-order skills of analysis and evaluation, develop strong cross-curricular links with, for example, with English and history, and promote the engagement with some demanding religious and philosophical thinking.
- Another major strength in the provision is the high-quality enrichment activities to support learning. The school has been very active in seeking contacts locally and further afield to provide students with first-hand experience of religion, particularly in the 'young voices' and 'celebrating faiths' projects.
- RE makes an outstanding contribution towards students' personal development. The subject encourages students to take matters of faith and religion seriously and to respect the views of others. Their attitudes towards the subject are excellent, supported by the strong focus on challenging them to think for themselves. They are clear that the subject provides excellent opportunities for them to articulate their own ideas, to express opinions, and to learn to respect the views of others.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- RE benefits from the good leadership of the experienced, well-informed subject leader who is very well supported by the senior leadership team. All aspects of the work of the department are driven by a shared commitment to high standards and the enrichment of students' wider personal development.
- The subject has high profile in the school. Its quality and character are reflective of, and embedded in, the wider values of the school with its emphasis on students' spiritual, social and emotional development, respect for all, and encouraging independent learning.
- The arrangements for assessing students' progress are satisfactory. However, the monitoring of students' progress within each strand of the subject over time is less well developed.
- RE makes an excellent contribution to the school's promotion of community cohesion. The department places a great emphasis on enabling the students to understand the significance of religion and its forms of expression in people's lives.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing a robust process of assessment for students taking core RE at Key Stage 4 and securing consistency in its implementation.

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. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector