

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



30 November 2011

Mr A Craig
Headteacher
The Nobel School
Mobbsbury Way
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG2 0HS

Dear Mr Craig

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 23 and 24 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; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Entry for the GCSE short and full courses is high and the pattern of attainment is significantly above the national averages. A dip in 2011 results reflected some staffing difficulties which have been resolved successfully. The department's monitoring of students' current attainment and progress indicates that the dip is being reversed quickly. The piloting of a different GCSE syllabus is particularly welcomed by students. They can explain the role and impact of religion in contemporary society with discernment and apply religious beliefs to social and moral issues confidently.
- By the end of Year 11, students make good progress from their average starting points, having attained standards that are broadly in line with the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus by the end of Year 9. Students develop a

good understanding of different religious beliefs and have a secure grasp of the influence of religion and belief on behaviour.

- Students are able to work well in pairs and groups and when required to work independently, they do so diligently. Year 10 and 11 students are particularly able to apply a range of skills to their studies such as analysis, interpretation, investigation and evaluation. Increasingly, students at Key Stage 3 are showing their ability to use thinking skills in the subject. Higher order skills that are more evident in the responses of Key Stage 4 students are underdeveloped in Years 7 to 9. Across both key stages, students 'learn about' and 'learn from' religion in a balanced way. Students routinely link their study of belief to their own experiences and readily reflect on different views of meaning and purpose in life.
- A small number of students have opted into AS and A-level courses in philosophy and ethics in the sixth form. Over recent years students have attained above average results at A-level, reflecting good progress.
- Students' personal development is good. Students' attitudes to learning are positive. The subject makes an important contribution to community cohesion and in developing students' appreciation of religious and cultural diversity found locally and in wider communities.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teachers have at least good subject expertise which they use skilfully to probe students' knowledge, thereby deepening their understanding of religion and belief. A good range of resources, including information and communication technology, is used effectively to promote good learning. The variety of approaches used includes role play, devising games, using suitable short clips from a range of media and structured discussions. Students' responses are often imaginative, recorded in poems, posters and extended pieces of writing.
- The most successful teaching is inspiring and ensures that students are active participants in their learning. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on the Buddha's life students thought about a statue and recorded their perceptions and questions with deep consideration. The teaching subsequently developed learning further in a structured way, through investigative approaches. Similarly, in a Year 11 lesson on exploring the impact of immigration in Britain, an enquiry-based approach enabled students to express and explore different views confidently in a climate of trust and respect. The issue of discrimination was discussed carefully and imaginatively within the context of religion and belief.
- Other features of good teaching include stimulating lesson starter tasks and the clear explanation of learning objectives. Tasks and questions are carefully adapted to ensure that all students have an opportunity to participate. Writing tasks sometimes use prompts and tools, such as writing frames, which support those who need help with literacy. Open-ended tasks, including homework tasks, help extend the higher attaining students.

- Formal marking of assessed tasks is detailed and enables students to have good feedback on strengths and how they can improve their work. There is a judicious use of peer-assessment, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and this promotes learning well. The use of self-assessment is satisfactory.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum is planned well, taking into account the development of students' personal learning and thinking skills, in response to a whole-school priority. The implementation is still at an early stage of development and has yet to show full impact in the context of subject-specific skills in Key Stage 3. Although much of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 is planned around the GCSE syllabus, teaching ensures that students' knowledge and understanding about religion and belief are coherent.
- There is a strong commitment in the subject to provide enriching experiences. The use of visits to different places of worship and of visitors to lessons has been stronger in the past than it is currently.
- The provision for AS and A-level study is increasingly popular with students who speak highly of it, including the personal impact it makes on their lives. There are limited planned opportunities for other students in the sixth form to explore issues related to religion and belief.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The subject leader is experienced, enthusiastic and a very good role model.
- Strengths and areas for further development are accurately identified through careful evaluation, reflecting the impact of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.
- The teaching team has a good professional approach towards their work and newly qualified teachers are supported well.
- The subject leader keeps abreast of national initiatives, maintains a positive profile of RE in the school and is continually seeking improvement in the provision and in students' outcomes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising standards by the end of Year 9 to higher levels as outlined in the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus so that students develop even better skills of interpretation, investigation and evaluation when exploring religion and belief
- extending opportunities for students to have first-hand experience of members of different religious and belief communities through visits and visiting speakers

- making further planned provision for all sixth-form students to explore issues related to beliefs and values.

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

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector