

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



7 February 2012

Mrs H Mullaney
Principal
The Heath School
Clifton Road
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 4SY

Dear Mrs Mullaney

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 19 and 20 January 2012 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 three lessons, an assembly, and an RE taster session.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades in the RE short course GCSE in recent years is well above the national average. The number gaining the higher A* and A grade is also above the national average. Girls do significantly better than boys, particularly at the higher grade level. A small cohort of students is entered each year for the full course GCSE and the results are impressive. Lower attaining students, who follow an alternative course with an RE component, also achieve well. Overall, progress at Key Stage 4 is good and improving. Current Year 11 students are doing very well and are predicted to exceed the previous year's performance.

- Students' attainment at Key Stage 3 is also good although progress is uneven across different aspects of the subject. This is being addressed through changes to the curriculum. Students in the current Year 9 have not developed a confident knowledge and understanding of a range of world religions. For example, their grasp of key beliefs of Christianity is weak. This limits the fluency with which they are able to apply religious perspectives to issues in Key Stage 4.
- Recent curriculum changes mean that students in the current Year 8 are developing good understanding and skills in relation to a range of religious and philosophical issues, for example, about the existence of God. Students in Year 7 are provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge of different world religions but this work sometimes lacks challenge, particularly for the more able.
- Learning in RE is mainly good with some outstanding features. At its best, RE develops a wide range of learning and thinking skills in relation, for example, to literacy and the process of enquiry. There are very good examples of students working independently and collaboratively. Students often produce impressive extended written pieces using the skills of argument effectively. Occasionally, tasks lack challenge, particularly in Year 7.
- Students enjoy RE and respond enthusiastically and with maturity to the opportunities to debate, discuss and analyse issues. They show respect for diversity and engage seriously with sensitive and demanding issues. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good with some outstanding features.

- RE lessons are consistently well organised and managed. Teachers convey a sense of enthusiasm and high expectations about the subject. They work hard to make learning exciting and interesting. A wide variety of stimulating tasks and resources is used. Good use is made of discussion and group work to ensure that students are actively involved in their learning. In one Year 8 lesson on creation, the students were provided with challenging resources to enable them to examine the idea of God as designer.
- Great care is taken to adjust the learning to ensure that it meets the needs of all students. In two classes exploring euthanasia, the resources and tasks were very carefully differentiated to ensure that everyone was challenged and able to make good progress.
- Teachers bring a high level of subject expertise to the learning and use a wide range of different approaches to the subject appropriately matched to the topics. In Year 7, there is scope to place more emphasis on developing enquiry skills when investigating the major world religions.
- Teachers usually explain the pattern of the work carefully giving students a clear idea of the purpose and direction of the learning. Occasionally,

while learning objectives are shared, students are less clear about the 'bigger picture' of their work.

- The arrangements for assessing students are good, particularly at Key Stage 4. A series of appropriate assessment opportunities is identified and work is marked regularly. Students' progress is monitored carefully and clear targets are set for improvement. Good use is made of levels and shared grade criteria at Key Stage 3 to secure an accurate assessment of progress.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- An outstanding strength of the curriculum is the range of pathways to accredit students' learning at Key Stage 4. Full and short GCSE courses are available, together with alternative qualifications for lower attaining students. This suite of qualifications secures high attainment and good progress for all.
- Careful decisions are being taken to structure the curriculum to secure a pattern of continuity and progression in students' learning. The department has recognised the need to monitor this pattern to ensure that learning is broad and balanced across all aspects of the subject. At present, the opportunities for more rigorous and systematic work investigating the key beliefs of the world religions are underdeveloped.
- The subject makes a very positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, the department recognises that the opportunities for students to meet and engage with representatives of religion and belief through the use of visits or visitors are limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good with some outstanding features.

- RE benefits from strong subject leadership, and the active support of the senior leadership of the academy. The subject team is highly effective and brings vision and passion to its work. The subject has experienced a period of turbulence in the recent past but, after significant development work, its status in the academy and in the eyes of the students is now high. In the words of one Year 11 student, the department now runs like a 'well-oiled machine'. The capacity for further improvement is very good.
- Effective use is made of data to monitor students' progress and evaluate the quality of the provision. There is a highly robust and detailed process of review and improvement planning. With the recent changes to the RE curriculum the department recognises it now needs to monitor carefully their impact on students' learning.
- The staffing, resources and learning environment of the subject are good. Effective use is made of in-school and external professional development

opportunities. A strength of the team is the scope for mutual support and the sharing of good practice.

- A significant strength of RE is the way in which it reflects and contributes to the wider life of the academy. The values of respect and inclusion permeate the subject. Opportunities are taken to build links with other aspects of academy life through the wider focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, personal, social and health education and assemblies.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to monitor and develop the curriculum to ensure:
 - more challenge for the most able, particularly in Year 7
 - a stronger focus on developing students' knowledge and understanding of specific world religions
 - that a clear focus on enquiry permeates all aspects of learning
 - the inclusion of more opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience of religion in the local and wider community.

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

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector