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Ms A France  
Principal  
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Dear Ms France

### **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 28 and 29 February 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.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

#### **Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is good.

- Full course GCSE results in 2011 were significantly above the national average. The proportion gaining the A\* or A grade was particularly high reflecting excellent achievement. The achievement of the students who took the short course GCSE in 2011 was good. The school has now introduced a different model of provision at Key Stage 4 with a cohort opting for full course GCSE and the majority taking core RE which is not accredited. A small group of students is taking AS GCE in Key Stage 4. There is further provision for advanced level GCE in the sixth form. Results at GCE vary year on year but broadly reflect good achievement. Current data and students' work in lessons show that most are on track to attain their challenging target grades. However, the progress of students who

have core RE is difficult to assess because the school does not keep records of their progress.

- Students make good progress through Key Stage 3 where attainment is well above average.
- All students demonstrate enthusiasm for learning RE in lessons. They respond well and show resilience when working with sensitive or challenging material. They develop a wide subject vocabulary and a strong sense of the vibrancy and diversity within the world of religion. They develop knowledge and understanding about a wide range of features of religion. Students handle concepts confidently and can use a good range of evidence, including scholarly views, to justify their own ideas while providing an evaluation of the perspectives of different religious traditions. A particular strength relates to students' ability to engage with and evaluate ethical and philosophical issues and concepts. In one GCE AS lesson students offered well-presented analytical responses to the issue of whether God is eternal and how this related to the idea that God is omniscient.

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

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teaching in RE has many strengths. Teachers manage students' behaviour well. Their subject knowledge is excellent and reflects a good level of preparation for lessons, supported by a strong curriculum framework.
- Teaching is effective in holding students' attention and in enabling them to ask and answer a range of challenging questions. Teachers' very skilfully engage students in deeper levels of analysis, particularly through the direct and systematic teaching of critical thinking skills.
- Students develop a strong understanding of complex questions. Teachers enable students to explore a range of social and ethical issues and come to their own judgements, for example, on issues related to prejudice and discrimination. As a result, students are able to make good connections between different aspects of the subject and understand the impact of commitment and belief on people's lives.
- Assessment arrangements in the examination classes ensure that students have a good idea of the level of their work and the areas they need to improve. Good use is made of self- and peer-assessment and carefully structured tasks, which often require a good level of challenge. Assessment in Key Stage 3 and in core RE in Years 10 and 11 is less well developed.

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The department has developed an effective curriculum that meets students' needs and interests, including those for the sixth form. Students speak positively about how their personal development is promoted

through RE lessons. Continuity and progression are harnessed very well through the key questions that drive each unit of work.

- The development of a systematic understanding of Christianity and the engagement with some demanding religious, ethical and philosophical thinking are key strengths of the provision and enable students to achieve well.
- RE makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development. Students are able to express their views and develop coherent and informed arguments about matters of belief, ethics and values.
- Limited use is made of visitors to the classroom and fieldwork opportunities to enable students to gain high-quality direct and first-hand experiences of a diversity of religious and faith communities.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The RE department benefits from effective leadership. The head of department has successfully maintained the good outcomes for students in examinations through the rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching.
- Arrangements for staff training and development are effective. These have ensured that all members of the department share the vision of the head of department and are signed up to continually improving their practice and gaining in expertise and provide an excellent basis for all the staff to work well together as a team.
- The subject has high profile in the school. Its quality and character are reflective of, and embedded in, the wider values of the school including its emphasis on students' independent learning.

### **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
- improving the consistency and quality of assessment across the department in Key Stage 3
- increasing the opportunities for students to engage with visits to, and visitors from, a wider variety of faith groups.

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**