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Mrs L Abercromby
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Abercromby

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 2 May 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 one RE lesson and two other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory although there is room for significant development in the provision for the subject at Key Stage 3.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- The overall pattern of achievement in RE across the school is uneven. Students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 where a range of accredited courses provides a structure to their learning. Those students taking the short course GCSE develop a basic knowledge of key features of Christianity and Islam and can talk about a range of moral and social issues. Those taking the Asdan award develop a basic understanding of the place of beliefs and values in society.
- The progress made by students at Key Stage 3 is limited. While they do have various opportunities to discuss values and a range of human experiences across the curriculum, their knowledge and understanding of religion is very restricted. Students develop a basic appreciation of the way

human beings have expressed ideas and feelings through different forms of religious and cultural expression – for example, in some work on aboriginal art.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- Evidence to support a judgement of the quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is very limited. While teachers include some strands of RE work within the wider curriculum, these are usually undeveloped and fragmented.
- Teaching at Key Stage 4 is good. Lessons are well planned and ensure the active participation of students in their learning. A variety of strategies are used to help students develop their knowledge of religion, meet the requirements of the accredited courses they are following, and maintain their interest and concentration. Students' behaviour is carefully managed.
- Students' work is marked appropriately at Key Stage 4 but currently no arrangements are in place to assess, record or report on students' progress in RE at Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory overall but requires significant improvement at Key Stage 3.

- The strength of the curriculum is the range of accredited courses available to students at Key Stage 4. An initial unit on 'Our World' provides students with a taster of RE and on the basis of their response they are given the option to follow a GCSE short course. Other students take the Asdan certificate course which includes a unit on 'beliefs and values'. This provision has incorporated opportunities for students to visit a variety of local places of worship including local churches and a Buddhist centre.
- The school is currently developing its Key Stage 3 curriculum based on the key principle of securing the engagement of students in their learning. Until relatively recently, very little provision was made for RE but the school has recognised the need to establish a more secure provision for the subject which meets and addresses the distinctive needs of the students. At present, provision is made through assemblies and the wider learning curriculum. Although a document is in place to track the key elements of RE, the provision is relatively ad hoc and unfocused. Much of the emphasis is on 'learning from' with limited attention to 'learning about' religion.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- RE benefits from the leadership of a specialist who brings a high level of expertise to the subject. Until recently, the focus of improvement has been on Key Stage 4 where the subject leadership is good. While another

member of staff has a broad oversight of RE at Key Stage 3, leadership and management of this component of the provision is less well developed.

- A clear policy for RE is in place which puts an appropriate emphasis on the need to meet the specific learning needs of the students. To date, however, this principle has not been developed or exemplified in sufficient detail to enable staff to implement an effective provision for the subject at Key Stage 3. For example, while a plan is set to develop portfolios of students' work to track their progress this has yet to be put in place. However, the subject improvement plan has a clear priority to map RE more systematically across the curriculum. The capacity for improvement is good.
- Appropriate resources are in place to support the Key Stage 4 curriculum but limited stimulus materials are available by which to engage students in their learning and support teachers in the development of their subject expertise at Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the provision for RE at Key Stage 3 by:
 - providing more structured planning guidelines which exemplify effective ways in which to integrate the subject within the wider learning curriculum
 - improving the resources for the subject to provide more stimulating and creative starting points to promote the students' interest and engagement in exploring religion
 - implementing the proposal to produce portfolios of students' work in RE in order to track their progress in the subject
 - extending opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience of religion through use of visits and visitors.

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

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector