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Mr P Baker
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Dear Mr Baker

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 13 and 14 June 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory with a good capacity for improvement.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the expectations set out in the national non-statutory framework for RE. This represents sound progress from students' broadly average starting points. Students have a secure grasp of the distinctive beliefs within and between religions and a broad understanding of why people belong to religions. Students reflect well on the challenges presented by religion and belief for their own viewpoints and developing beliefs.
- Students' achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 is satisfactory, reflecting the variable quality of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11. While they have opportunities to explore a range of philosophical, moral and ethical lines of enquiry, students' overall knowledge and understanding of religions and

beliefs are insufficiently developed. This limits their ability to apply knowledge about religion and belief to questions raised by philosophical enquiry.

- The contribution of RE to students' personal development is good. Students have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to explain why it is important to learn about religious and cultural diversity in contemporary Britain. As one student put it, 'I think our study of religions gives you something to think about, especially about the world and yourself'. The subject makes a valuable contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students' behaviour in the lessons observed was good.

Quality of teaching in RE

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

- The lessons are structured well to engage students from the outset. Students usually have a clear view about learning objectives and outcomes.
- Typically, teachers use a broad range of resources to enliven learning. Where teaching is most successful, students are active participants in their learning. This is facilitated by some imaginative tasks and activities enabling students to work in pairs, small groups and independently. For example in a Year 8 lesson students worked successfully to broaden their understanding about the role of religion in society.
- Opportunities for students to reflect on questions of meaning and purpose and to express their own views in an informed way were evident in two lessons observed. Students made good progress in their learning because of well-organised teaching, good-quality questioning to probe students' understanding, and focused discussion. Students say that frequent occasions occur in lessons when they reflect on their learning and their progress.
- In less effective teaching and planning, students do not have enough opportunities to pursue questions that they have raised themselves and occasional over-direction is given by teachers which limits students' ability to show their independence in learning.
- Assessment systems are fit for purpose. Teachers and students use assessment criteria confidently. Students make the most of the opportunities for self- and peer-assessment and teachers' marking of work usually sets clear targets for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Clearly documented schemes of work are in place and these are reviewed and amended periodically. Within a citizenship structure is a clear identification of discrete RE units. Continuity and progression in learning is defined well across Key Stage 3, securing coverage of a range of religions

and beliefs. Suitable opportunities are in place for different types of assessment, including diagnostic and summative.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is largely defined by a philosophy, morality and ethics course of study which engages students' interests well. However, it lacks a sufficient coverage of religion and belief and restricts students' abilities to apply their skills to interpret and evaluate religious concepts and ideas.
- Sixth form provision is principally met through a consortium of schools. Students have opportunities to explore beliefs through, for example, assemblies and 'challenge days'.
- Although some students visit a local church and a synagogue, limited visits and visitors are provided to enhance the quality of learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

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

- RE is part of a humanities faculty which is well led. Very recently, responsibility for the RE elements of the provision has been given to a member of staff in the faculty, who has used the benefits from a recent professional development opportunity to impact on classroom practice.
- Staff are enthusiastic about RE and are committed to improving students' achievement further. Self-evaluation is accurate, based on a range of evidence, including students' own views about their learning. The findings from evaluations help to inform an action plan which identifies the right priorities for improvement.
- Senior leaders recognise that continuing professional development for all staff is essential to raising standards in RE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of the Key Stage 4 curriculum by providing a more in-depth study of religion and belief
- increasing opportunities for students to meet members of religious communities, through for example, contact with visiting speakers and trips to places of worship.

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

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector