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Dear Mrs Owen

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 11 and 12 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 good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- The GCSE results in 2011 in both the short and full courses are at least in line with national averages and have previously been well above. Students regardless of their starting points make good progress. The proportion of students who gained the higher grades of A and A* increased in 2011 with more boys than girls attaining at this level. Results are predicted to rise again this year as the department has been successful at raising the attainment and progress of targeted students.
- Students apply the teachings from religion to the ethical and moral issues they study with growing insight. In one lesson students offered well-presented evaluative responses to differing viewpoints on capital punishment including how these views fit with the wider Christian beliefs

in the sanctity of life, the concept of forgiveness and the differing standpoints in the Old and New Testaments.

- Attainment at the end of Year 8 is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Students handle concepts well and can use evidence to justify their own ideas. This is in part due to the systematic way in which students are taught to evaluate information critically.
- Students have positive attitudes to their work and the quality of their learning is consistently good and often excellent. In lessons, students are fully engaged and respond very well to the interesting activities that include working in pairs, groups and completing investigations.

Quality of teaching in RE

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

- Among the significant features of the most successful lessons is the ability of teachers to excite students and to engage with the different aspects of the subject. Consistent features of teaching include: excellent subject knowledge; high expectations; exceptionally good relationships, which promote the exemplary behaviour of students; very careful planning and structuring of lessons that ensure activities match students' needs well; and, the excellent use of probing questions that extend students' thinking and thereby deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- Marking is usually developmental and constructive in tone, but occasionally is not always helpful in promoting students' progress. Sometimes, teachers do not give specific feedback on how to improve and how to reach the next level, particularly in Years 7 and 8. Marking in GCSE is thorough and prepares students carefully for success in the examination.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The quality of the curriculum is good at Key Stage 4 because the students' learning experiences are well structured.
- The selection of topics and distribution of units in Key Stage 3 allow students to study issues related to beliefs, practices and to work towards developing the 24 dispositions identified in the locally agreed syllabus. This is achieved through a variety of themes and well-planned cross-curricular opportunities.
- The department has ensured that thinking skills and literacy are promoted very well within the RE curriculum and this is especially noticeable in the demanding written tasks that students often undertake. However, occasionally momentum is lost at Key Stage 3 because some units are undemanding, while others, such as the Year 8 unit on Jesus in Art, offer a good level of challenge.
- The contribution of RE to the personal development of students is excellent. They show an interest in religion and adopt an appropriate

respect for the beliefs and practices of others. Students have a very clear understanding of ethical and moral issues. RE ensures that students develop a good understanding of growing up in a varied and multicultural Britain and beyond. The use of fieldwork, visits and visitors does much to enhance community awareness and the importance of personal responsibility.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- Members of the department at all levels have worked hard to improve the quality of learning. The RE leadership team has a clear sense of purpose and is working well to increase the rate of improvement.
- Regular monitoring of outcomes and provision leads to an accurate evaluation of the quality of learning. Teaching is consistently good and often outstanding because there is an expectation that all staff will become highly effective so that all students can achieve their maximum potential. This climate results in reflective teachers who strive hard to ensure that their practice is at the highest possible level.
- The arrangements for assessing students' progress are good with effective use made of assessment data to evaluate their progress. However, the department is aware that some of the assessment tasks set are not as challenging as they could be.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the consistency and quality of the curriculum across the department in Key Stage 3 to better ensure progression into Key Stage 4
- structuring assessment tasks to enable students to attain at the higher levels.

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