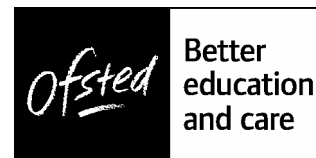


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Mr M Ainsworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ainsworth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 and 5 December 2006 to look at work in religious education (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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in RE is good overall.

- While standards attained by students in RE are broadly in line with those seen nationally, the progress they make is good. The performance of students at GCSE is impressive and high relative to the pattern of their overall attainment in other subjects. Their ability to offer informed perspectives on ethical and social issues is particularly good. The pattern

of students' achievement at Key Stage 3 is more uneven. In some classes students make good and very good progress, elsewhere however progress only satisfactory. Students develop a reasonable understanding of religions and are able to express their own viewpoints and opinions. However, their ability to offer more extended consideration of religious material is limited by weaknesses in their literacy skills.

- Students in RE have very good attitudes to learning and show a lively respect for the views of others. They are positive about exploring social and moral issues. The subject makes a particularly important contribution to the students' self confidence, their ability to work collaboratively, and to their awareness and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in RE is good with some very good features.

- There are many very good features of teaching in RE. Many lessons model high expectations; they are pacy, skilfully structured and very well-organised; relationships with students are good and, as a result, they enjoy the subject; and, effective use is made of lively, varied and engaging teaching strategies and resource materials to ensure participation in learning by all ability groups.
- Assessment arrangements, which include some good use of self-assessment and target-setting, ensure students understand what they need to do to improve further. At its best, teaching provides students with outstanding support and encouragement enabling them to achieve very well.
- Where the teaching is by non-specialists, some of the quality of learning is satisfactory rather than good. In these cases links between aspects of the learning are not consolidated effectively and, occasionally, tasks do not challenge students to think for themselves.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- Considerable attention has been paid to developing a curriculum which relates to the needs and interests of the students. The pattern of work across both key stages provides continuity and progression and helps ensure the good achievement. The scheme of work follows the agreed syllabus closely. There is scope to develop aspects of the medium term planning at Key Stage 3 to ensure the outcomes for each unit and lesson are more closely defined and differentiated.

- The provision for RE at Key Stage 4 meets statutory requirements. The non-examination core RE curriculum has been carefully designed to match the requirements of the agreed syllabus and support the delivery of citizenship. This reflects the keen commitment of the college to ensure RE enriches students' wider personal development. The GCSE course is very well designed and organised to ensure students are able to achieve well.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of RE are good.

- The subject leader, well-supported by the senior leadership team, has carried out a very thorough evaluation of the work of the department. This is linked to a comprehensive improvement plan which is carefully integrated with the wider college plan and is sharply focused on raising achievement. As a result the capacity of the subject to improve is very good.
- The subject is very well led by an outstanding subject leader; it is well well-established in the College and makes a very positive contribution to its overall priorities. The subject is currently facing staffing difficulties which are beginning to have some impact on the quality of the provision. While efforts are being made to manage these difficulties it will be important to address the issue to avoid the impact becoming more serious.

Implementation of the agreed syllabus

- The process of implementing the agreed syllabus, although not included in its current improvement plan, is well-embedded in the work of the department. Care needs to be taken with the next steps in the development of the use of the levels of attainment to extend their use in planning and to ensure the assessment process does not become over-convoluted.

Inclusion

- There is a very strong culture of inclusion in many RE lessons. Emphasis is placed on seeking to ensure the contribution and viewpoints of all students are valued. Good use is made of assessment data, particularly at Key Stage 4, to identify and support students who are under-achieving.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to monitor carefully the impact of the use of non-specialist staffing on student achievement in RE and resolve the situation as soon as possible
- to review the use made of levels of attainment to ensure these inform planning and assessment more effectively
- to continue to develop the use of more varied and extended independent written work to ensure students are able to access the higher levels of attainment in RE with confidence.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and, in the case of RE, SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Her Majesty's Inspector