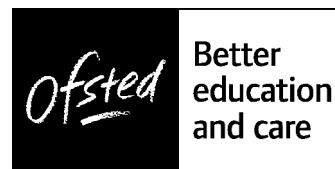


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Mr T Seadon
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Dear Mr Seadon

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 and 7 February 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus.

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, students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in RE are satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with the Norfolk agreed syllabus expectations. The higher attaining students exceed the expectations. Overall, students' progress is satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are above average, as indicated by the full course GCSE results in recent years. Students following this course of study achieve well. The 2006 results in the GCSE short course were below average. The school has identified students whose progress is not as good as it should be, especially boys. Their achievement in the short course is not as high as that of the girls.
- The contribution of RE to students' personal development is good. Students show positive attitudes towards the subject as well as a commitment to their learning. They have high aspirations.
- The students find RE interesting and valuable in developing their knowledge and understanding about a broad range of religious and cultural beliefs and practices. They also value the many opportunities in RE to express their opinions and know that teachers and other students listen and respect their views. Students also appreciate opportunities to explore their own views in some depth.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. RE makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- All teachers form good relationships with students which help to engage and motivate them. Teaching is usually well informed and progress in students' learning is secured by their active participation in discussions, debates and role play. Students particularly enjoy these activities.
- Some students' progress is impeded because teaching takes insufficient account of their specific needs and preferred learning styles. This is most marked in the case of the less able students. There is limited use of ICT in the subject.
- Assessment procedures are underdeveloped, especially at Key Stage 3. The marking of students' work is variable, ranging from helpful comments about how students can improve their performance to cursory ticks. An analysis of trial examinations in Year 11 and some other formal assessments help to indicate students' progress and identify underachievement. The department has devised a helpful tool to assess students' standards, based closely on the agreed syllabus level descriptors. However, as yet, there is no systematic way of assessing and tracking students' progress or to inform teachers' planning in the light of on-going assessment.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is satisfactory with some good elements.

- The provision of both GCSE short and full courses are notable strengths. They contribute well to students' enjoyment of learning because topics studied are meaningfully linked to topical, contemporary issues.

- The implementation of the agreed syllabus at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. There is a useful transition unit to prepare students for the GCSE courses. Some work has been done on developing planning to ensure that each unit builds on prior learning. Further construction of schemes of work will need to identify continuity and the assessment of learning.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of RE are satisfactory overall.

- The head of department is enthusiastic, has very good subject knowledge and is committed to improvement. A start has been made at formal self-evaluation, so that strengths and areas for further development have been carefully identified. However, a subject action plan has not yet been formulated to enable the department and senior leaders to evaluate the impact of actions taken to address the identified weaknesses.
- Observations of teaching are undertaken by the head of department and constructive feedback is given to secure improvement. Other aspects of departmental management are insufficiently developed. The potential for using formal departmental meetings to share ideas and focus sharply on standards is not fully realised. Senior leaders recognise the need to provide a structure for this to occur more regularly.

Implementation of the Agreed Syllabus

- The publication of the new Norfolk agreed syllabus provides an ideal opportunity to review the school's RE provision. The syllabus has been welcomed enthusiastically in the school and the department has begun to implement it with considerable commitment. A notable impact of the agreed syllabus in the school is the sharper focus it has given to the importance of improving assessment in the subject.

Inclusion

- The provision for inclusion is satisfactory. The department is committed to providing equality of access and helping students to achieve and enjoy in the subject. It is recognised that more needs to be done to improve the achievement of boys and to extend the range of teaching styles to suit the needs of the less able students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing rigorous assessment procedures to improve students' achievement and the quality of teaching
- establishing a pattern of routine meetings to share ideas, disseminate effective practice and meet professional development needs

- completing the formulation of schemes of work which clearly identify assessment opportunities and how the different needs of students will be met.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector