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Dear Mrs Pickerill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education and
Citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Judith Straw, Additional Inspector, on 26 and 27 February 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE) and citizenship.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus and the ways in which the school has implemented citizenship and any evidence of provision for the part of the programme of study concerned with Britain's diversity.

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.

Religious education

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good with many outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is good overall, and outstanding in a number of important areas.

- The results attained by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above the national average. A very high proportion of pupils gain good grades in either the full and short course GCSE. The percentage gaining A* and A grades is particularly high. This reflects the outstanding achievement of pupils from Year 9 onwards. These impressive results have been sustained over a number of years.
- The standards reached by pupils in Years 7 and 8 are broadly in line with the expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus. This represents satisfactory achievement across the first two years of their secondary education.
- The pupils achieve well across most of areas of the subject. Their ability to explain and evaluate philosophical and ethical issues is particularly strong as is their understanding of a number of key areas of Christian belief and practice. Their skills in investigating and analysing the wider diversity of religious practice and the place of religion in contemporary society are more limited but are improving.
- Pupils' personal development in RE is very good and often outstanding. Their behaviour and approach to learning are very impressive. They develop and maintain very positive and mature attitudes towards their work as a result of the very good climate of learning established in RE lessons. The pupils' spiritual, moral and social understanding is very good. Their awareness of cultural diversity is more limited because restricted emphasis is placed upon this in the curriculum.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in RE is good and often outstanding.

- Lessons are very well planned with careful attention to structuring and managing the pupils' learning. Activities are usually varied, paced, carefully explained and highly engaging. Very good use is made of white board technology and pair work to ensure pupils are actively involved in their learning.
- A specific strength is the effective use of questioning and discussion work to extend pupils' oracy skills, focus their learning and check their progress. In most lessons the interplay of oral work and written tasks is very well managed and, as a result, pupils quickly establish and consolidate their knowledge and understanding. Very careful and successful attention is paid to encouraging pupils to work in mixed gender groupings.

- The department is building a strong pattern of assessment arrangements to track pupils' progress and ensure they are clear about ways of moving to a higher level of attainment. Effective use is made of self and peer assessment. Good support is provided to help pupils develop and deploy the literacy skills required by the GCSE examination.
- There is scope to use a slightly wider range of strategies to extend the level of challenge for the most able pupils and the opportunities for all pupils to develop higher order independent learning skills.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good and, in many ways, outstanding.

- The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the provision of a range of accredited courses to meet the needs of all pupils from Year 9 onwards is very impressive and extremely well-managed. The take-up for full course GCSE is high, again reflecting the very positive attitudes pupils have towards RE.
- The curriculum for Years 7 and 8 is well supported with detailed lesson planning and provides a satisfactory programme which builds pupils' knowledge about Christianity and three other major religious traditions. However, the level of challenge and the pattern of progression over the two years are not always well defined. The provision would benefit from the refinement of the medium term planning documentation.
- A strength of the curriculum and assessment arrangements is the skilful way in which the department interweaves the two major areas of RE attainment into pupils' learning.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities to support learning in RE including use of visits and visitors as well as booster classes. There is scope to extend the opportunities for pupils to experience a wider diversity of religious traditions.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of RE are outstanding.

- RE is taught by a range of staff, some of whom are not subject specialists. A strength of the department's leadership and management is the highly effective way in which these staff are supported and make a positive contribution to the progress of the pupils.
- The head of subject, who has other major leadership responsibilities in the school, monitors and evaluates the work of the department effectively. She has established a department which embodies very high expectations and an excellent climate for learning, and has a clear commitment to continuous improvement.

- The resources and accommodation for the subject are very well managed. Documentation to support colleagues is clear and straightforward. Careful attention is paid to ensuring that the arrangements for assessment and target-setting are efficient and manageable although care will need to be taken to ensure these arrangements do not become over-complicated.
- The subject receives excellent support from the senior leadership team and makes an outstanding contribution to the life of the school.

Implementation of the agreed syllabus

The department has taken note of the revised agreed syllabus in the design of its curriculum and assessment arrangements. While the provision in the school meets the basic statutory requirements of the syllabus, the latter has not been used directly as the basis for developing the provision in the school.

Inclusion

The provision of a varied, well-managed range of accredited courses, meeting the needs of all pupils, reflects the strong commitment of the department to inclusion. This is further reflected in the high standards attained by all groups of pupils. The pattern of attainment of both boys and girls is very good as a result of the highly effective range of strategies designed to secure equality of opportunity for all. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and are well-supported by, in particular, the teaching assistant attached to the department. There is scope to extend the challenge for the most able pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the curriculum in Years 7 and 8 to consider how levelling might be used to ensure the pitch and progression in pupils' learning are more closely defined
- ensuring the way assessment levels and grades are used is not over-complicated and relate closely to national guidelines and local requirements
- incorporating further opportunities to extend and challenge the most able pupils
- extending opportunities for pupils to explore the religious diversity of modern Britain.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are satisfactory.

- Pupils demonstrate good understanding of some aspects of the citizenship curriculum but their knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete.
- The lack of assessment in citizenship makes it impossible for staff to identify progress within and between key stages.
- In lessons pupils discuss and debate a wide range of issues and use ICT (information and communication technology) effectively so that they have well-developed skills of enquiry and communication. However, pupils are not made aware of the citizenship elements in other subjects and cannot identify how well they are doing.
- The School Council is effective. The school also has representatives on the area Youth Council and there are numerous activities in which pupils make a significant contribution to the school, local and wider communities.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers across the curriculum demonstrate good knowledge and use a range of topical resources but do not always identify citizenship elements within their subject areas.
- Teachers train pupils to use ICT well for research and presentation. Their citizenship project on energy resources is particularly impressive.
- Teaching in PSICHE (personal, social, citizenship, health education) lacks urgency. Work in these lessons is rarely marked or assessed.
- Assessment is inadequate.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

- Locating citizenship within the PSICHE programme means that less than 50% of the time available is given to citizenship. The curriculum lacks depth and breadth and there is no scope for re-visiting topics.
- Several subjects make a significant contribution to the pupils' knowledge and understanding of citizenship but work is not identified as such nor marked as citizenship.

- The school recognises that the curriculum in Key Stage 4 is currently unsatisfactory because there are significant gaps. This will be addressed by the long-term plan to introduce a half GCSE course into Year 11.
- Opportunities for pupils to participate in citizenship-related activities are good.

Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The subject co-ordinator has been in post for 12 months. An effective audit has identified strengths and weaknesses. There is a clear vision of what needs to be done and how to go about it.
- Senior management has given full backing to the subject co-ordinator to develop citizenship so that it better meets statutory requirements.

Subject issue: provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

Pupils learn about migration and the development of multi-cultural cities in geography; they look at the beliefs and customs of other faiths in religious education as well as the causes and effects of racism and, in Year 8, there is a discrete citizenship course of lessons on cultural diversity in Britain. However, the school has no planned programme of study in this area and there is little opportunity for pupils to develop greater understanding of multi-cultural Britain.

Inclusion

Teachers plan well for the range of pupils they teach in other subjects across the curriculum but this is not the case in class PSHE lessons. Opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of citizenship in Key Stage 4 vary according to the option choices made by students. All pupils are able to engage in a wide range of community activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- implementing assessment in citizenship
- co-ordinating the curriculum more effectively so that pupils know when they are covering citizenship topics in other subjects
- improving the curriculum at Key Stage 4.

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

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