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Mr P Mitchell
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Dear Mr Mitchell

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 March 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 seven part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in RE are good.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the expectations of the Norfolk agreed syllabus. Students make good progress.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are above those attained nationally, as indicated by the GCSE full and short course results in recent years. In 2006, the students' achievement in the short course examination was particularly good because of focused intervention and challenging teaching.
- The contribution of RE to students' personal development is good. Students show positive attitudes towards the subject. In part, this reflects the subject leader's promotion of RE in the school, supported by other members of the department and senior leaders. The positive attitudes are also a result of the students' good progress and enjoyment in RE.
- The students find RE interesting and valuable in developing their knowledge of, and understanding about, a broad range of religious and cultural beliefs and practices. Students also appreciate the impact of RE on developing them as young people, enabling them to gain insights into their own beliefs and feelings. RE makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour in lessons observed was very good. Students were keen to learn and contribute their ideas.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- All teachers form good relationships with students which help to engage and motivate them. Lessons are planned in detail. A broad range of teaching strategies are used because teachers know that students learn in different ways. However, not enough use is made of strategies to enable pupils to develop more independent learning skills.
- Classroom displays include students' work and other stimulating materials which encourage students to reflect on beliefs and practices.
- Assessment procedures are good. Teachers use the attainment level descriptors from the agreed syllabus confidently. The criteria for marking assessed pieces of work are shared with students and feedback usually gives them clear guidance on how to improve their work. Self and peer assessment is used routinely to involve students in their learning.
- A system to track students' progress is increasingly effective in identifying underachievement. The department can demonstrate how an analysis of students' performance at Key Stage 4 leads to adjustments in teaching and improved results.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is good.

- The provision of both GCSE short and full courses are notable strengths. The focus on social, ethical and philosophical issues makes a very positive contribution to students' learning and their wider personal development.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 takes full account of the agreed syllabus requirements, supplemented by a useful transition unit to prepare students for the GCSE courses. The agreed syllabus is used well to draw up comprehensive schemes of work. There is a structured framework for the schemes, using national guidance.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of RE are good.

- The subject leader is enthusiastic and provides good leadership and direction to colleagues. The non-specialist teachers in the department are supported well. There is a strong commitment to securing improvement. The self-evaluation accurately identifies the strengths and weaknesses and the development plan has the right priorities for further improvement.
- Observations of teaching provide constructive feedback. A scrutiny of students' work also enables the subject leader to evaluate the impact of teaching. Departmental meetings are used well to focus on teaching and learning, including disseminating effective practice. The subject leader recognises the need to refine the system for tracking students' progress at Key Stage 3, so that an informed overview can lead to further targeted intervention.

Implementation of the agreed syllabus

- The publication of the revised Norfolk agreed syllabus has been welcomed enthusiastically in the school and the department is implementing it successfully.
- The department's close interest in the formulation of the agreed syllabus has enabled the teachers to plan in advance, pilot some initiatives and use the findings to revise schemes of work.

Inclusion

- The provision for inclusion is good. The department is committed to providing equality of access and helping students to achieve and enjoy in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing students' independent learning skills in the subject

- refining the tracking system in Years 7 to 9 so that the information can be used to evaluate students' performance and take remedial action where needed.

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