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Ms R Williamson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Williamson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit with Jacqui Wordsworth HMI on 3 and 4 May 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE, the visit had a particular focus on the subject's contribution to the promotion of community cohesion.

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of students in RE is satisfactory.

- There is insufficient evidence at present to make a clear judgement about standards and overall achievement at Key Stage 4. Since 2006 all students follow an integrated humanities GCSE course which incorporates a significant RE component. The progress made by Year 10 students in the lessons observed was good. They demonstrated, for

example, a clear understanding of the relationship between religion and culture and were able to apply this understanding to their study of the ethics of abortion.

- While students' achievement at Key Stage 3 is uneven, it is satisfactory overall. Students develop a broad understanding of the diversity of religion within their local community and in Britain. They also have a growing appreciation of the impact that religion has on the way of life of individuals and communities. When given the opportunity to respond to higher levels of challenge, students make good progress and demonstrate, for example, the ability to interpret, synthesise and apply their understanding of key features of a religion.
- However, use of the skills of explaining and analysing religion is sometimes limited by variability in the quality of teaching and the Key Stage 3 curriculum. While they can sometimes express their ideas orally, this is not always reflected in the quality of their written work. Some higher ability students are not being extended sufficiently because the tasks they are set lack challenge. Less able students are often well-supported and, as a result, make good progress.
- The personal development of students in RE is good. Most show a lively interest in religion and a keen respect for the beliefs and practices of others. They value the subject and recognise the contribution it makes to the development of understanding and tolerance. This was particularly well represented by a group of students who had participated in a creative partnership initiative linked to the exploration of ultimate questions through art. It was also shown in the decision of a sixth form sociology group to focus on religion as a theme for study recognising its relevance in the modern world.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Much teaching is characterised by clear structuring of lessons, positive relationships with students and sound subject knowledge. In the best lessons the tasks are challenging, teachers use appropriate questions to structure students' work and good use is made a range of stimulating and imaginative resources. Teachers often bring their expertise from other subject areas to impact positively on RE. As a result, the teaching often emphasises successfully the relevance of the subject to contemporary issues.
- There is some unevenness in the quality of teaching. Learning is not always well-matched to the varying needs of students. Planning makes insufficient reference to the varied levels at which the students are working. Insufficient attention is paid to clarifying the learning outcomes of lessons and the overall direction and purpose of learning both within the lesson and the wider units of work. On occasions, teaching does not consolidate learning effectively or make the links between different phases of a lesson explicit enough.
- Considerable attention has been paid to developing assessment arrangements in RE. Work is marked regularly and some good use is made of self and peer assessment. Structured, manageable and

levelled assessment tasks have been introduced together with some materials to exemplify standards. However, as yet judgements are not reliable or robust enough and more use needs to be made of the outcomes to inform planning and ensure learning is pitched correctly.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- Significant progress has been made since the last full school inspection to improve the provision for RE. The subject now meets the statutory requirements of the agreed syllabus. The Humanities GCSE, which is followed by all students at Key Stage 4, incorporates a substantial RE component and there are plans to extend provision further through introduction of Short Course GCSE in religious studies for some students. The post-16 provision broadly matches the agreed syllabus requirements through, for example, the occasional day conferences focused on themes such as islamophobia.
- The incorporation of RE within a Humanities structure at Key Stage 3 provides a good context for the subject and overcomes the barriers to success sometimes seen in single subject contexts. There is scope to extend this by building further links between the learning in RE and in the other humanities subjects in relation to, for example, the development of thinking and literacy skills.
- There is currently a lack of clear progression and continuity in the RE curriculum at Key Stage 3. Insufficient use is made of levels in planning to ensure that learning in RE builds progressively and this leads to the unevenness in student achievement across the key stage. Some students at Key Stage 4 are not clear enough about the direction of some of their RE related learning in the GCSE humanities programme.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory with some good features.

- Good progress since the last inspection to ensure the subject meets statutory requirements, to raise its profile across the school, and to establish the position of RE within the broad humanities faculty. As a result the subject now makes a very positive contribution to students' personal development and to the wider life of the school. The subject is well-supported by the senior leadership team.
- The RE subject leader has developed good links locally to share good practice and is providing regular training and support for her humanities colleagues. Good advantage has been taken of the opportunities to work closely with the local authority adviser in the development of, for example, assessment tasks. Close attention is paid to national developments in the subject.
- The roles and responsibilities for RE are clear and strategies have been introduced to monitor and evaluate the provision. There is scope to extend the analysis of data and the outcomes of monitoring to make

sure barriers to raising achievement in the subject are identified and addressed more systematically.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution on the promotion of community cohesion; the teaching encourages respect for diversity and the development of students' confidence to express personal views about religion. Students say the subject strongly promotes racial and religious harmony in the school. There is scope to extend the way the opportunities to link to the wider local community through more fieldwork and contact with local religious groups.

Inclusion

Many aspects of the provision for RE reflect a positive approach to inclusion; for example, the in-class support for students with learning difficulties is often good. More use could be made of the data available on the performance of different groups of students to evaluate their progress. Planning needs to take more account of the different learning needs of all students, particularly the more able.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using the opportunity provided by the revision of the locally agreed syllabus to restructure the RE curriculum and ensure greater progression and continuity in learning across Key Stage 3
- securing greater consistency in the quality of teaching
- improving the quality, reliability and consistency of marking and assessment particularly at Key Stage 3
- focusing the support provided to develop students' literacy skills especially in the use they make of extended writing.

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

As we explained in the 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

Alan Brine  
Her Majesty's Inspector