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Dear Mr Mills

Ofsted survey inspection programme – religious education and citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 11, 12 and 13 June 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 RE the visit had a particular focus on the subject's contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. In the case of citizenship, as well as looking at the ways in which the school has implemented citizenship in the curriculum, we were particularly interested in 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons in both RE and citizenship.

Religious education

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in RE are broadly average and pupil achievement, while variable, is at least satisfactory and often good.

- GCSE full course results in 2006 were well above the national average representing satisfactory achievement for the small cohort of pupils entered. Pupils taking GCSE in the current Year 11 have made good progress and are on target to achieve well. Similarly, the progress of pupils taking the GCSE course in Year 10 is good. The achievement of the majority of pupils in RE at Key Stage 4 is less clear because, until recently, assessment arrangements have not been robust or reliable enough. However, plans to enter some pupils for the GCSE short course are now being considered and initial assessments of their progress are positive.
- The assessment arrangements at Key Stage 3 are also not yet providing reliable judgements of pupils' overall performance in RE. However, the inspection findings indicate that the progress for most pupils is at least satisfactory with many making good progress.
- The most recent work, which is based on much more reliable assessment arrangements, shows many pupils deploying higher order skills in their investigation of religion and using a wide range of technical religious and philosophical language effectively.
- Where pupil achievement is good they demonstrate: a broad knowledge and understanding of religions; confident use of key concepts of the subject; a strong ability to apply prior learning in new contexts and engage critically with some challenging and complex religious texts and imagery; and, an ability to structure argument effectively. This pattern of good achievement is not, however, evenly represented across all years and teaching groups because the innovative new curriculum is not yet fully in place, and non-specialist and extended supply teaching is sometimes limiting the progress pupils make in some lessons.
- Many of the tasks across the key stage extend pupils' skills in investigating, analysing and interpreting religion. The emphasis on ensuring that pupils' learning 'about religion' is challenging provides a good bedrock on which to advance their learning 'from religion'.
- At present, the unreliability of the overall assessment arrangements make it difficult for the school to analyse the relative performance of different groups of pupils, but the inspection found that both boys and girls responded well to the subject and, in the best lessons, were making equally good progress. Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates most ability levels are making at least satisfactory progress.
- The personal development of pupils in the context of RE is generally good and, on occasions, very good. Many pupils, particularly those taking the full course GCSE, are very enthusiastic about the subject and enjoy the challenge of debating and discussing issues of significance to them. They take the subject seriously and value the opportunity it provides to develop their understanding of diversity. Behaviour is usually good and, when given the opportunity, pupils participate sensibly in group work and active learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- In the best lessons, teaching and learning in RE are at least good, often very good and, on occasions, outstanding. Relationships with pupils are excellent and teaching generates a genuine excitement about the subject.
- High expectations and the skilful management of learning ensure pupils have a clear understanding of the purpose of their tasks and consolidate ideas and skills effectively. Some very effective use is made of high quality teacher exposition and questioning to extend pupils' critical thinking.
- An emerging strength is the very good use being made of some evocative and challenging resource materials to extend pupils' ability to interpret and respond to religious ideas and symbolism. Group work and discussion are handled effectively. Some highly effective use is made of whiteboard technology to, for example, record the outcome of group work and involve pupils in shaping the pattern of learning.
- Particularly effective GCSE teaching enables pupils to make rapid progress in deploying critical thinking to engage with complex philosophical and theological issues.
- While care is taken to ensuring pupils are involved in lessons, on occasions insufficient attention is paid to checking that all understand the learning.
- Recent staffing changes have necessitated the temporary use of some non-specialist teachers in RE. In most cases, this is securing teaching and learning which are at least satisfactory and lessons are orderly and classes well-managed. However, insecure subject knowledge means some teachers do not provide pupils with a clear enough understanding of the purpose and direction of their learning. On these occasions, while pupils often show an interest in their work and are able to offer interesting ideas, these are not used effectively enough to consolidate the learning.
- RE work is marked regularly and some good use is beginning to be made of levels in assessment. At its best, marking provides pupils with detailed feedback on their progress and clear pointers for improvement. Assessment at GCSE is particularly good and pupils are given very clear information about the criteria used to assess their work, their progress, and targets to improve. Good support is provided to help pupils prepare for their exams through the use of revision guides. Carefully designed and levelled assessment tasks are being introduced in Key Stage 3. Care needs to be taken to ensure these are not over-structured for more able pupils to the point where the opportunities for them to write independently are constrained. Some interesting and innovative use is being made of peer marking by, for example, encouraging Year 10 pupils to develop their understanding of assessment criteria through supporting the marking of the work of Year 7 pupils.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good with some emerging outstanding features.

- Very impressive progress has been made in the past year to develop the curriculum for Key Stage 3. The new schemes of work are mapped to ensure coverage of the requirements of the agreed syllabus. At the same time, planning has been revised to incorporate a very strong emphasis of blending aspects of modern youth culture with a rigorous investigation of religion.
- The approach to, for example, the introduction to RE in Year 7 includes a strong emphasis on developing higher order concepts and skills. Of particular note is a unit of symbolism which focuses pupils on linking very challenging biblical material with contemporary visual and musical imagery.
- The schemes of work are well planned with careful attention being paid to the provision of a clear overall picture of the purpose of each unit. The structure of the revised curriculum incorporates a strong pattern of continuity and progression in the pupils' learning.
- While it is too early to evaluate the full impact of the changes, the evidence indicates they have substantially improved pupils' attitudes to the subject and are raising standards significantly. The new curriculum will require skilful teaching and a high degree of careful interpretation to be effective. For this reason, the school is aware of the need to address the issue of non-specialist teaching as soon as practicable.
- There is good provision at Key Stage 4 with an increasing number of pupils opting for full course GCSE and consideration of entering some for short course GCSE. Various options for RE from Year 9 onwards are being carefully explored.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The leadership of the subject is undergoing a period of transition which is being well-managed working closely with the main subject specialist. A careful action plan has been put in place to manage this transition with a clear focus on well-judged immediate and medium term priorities.
- The subject self-evaluation is a frank assessment of the subject's strengths and needs. It has rightly identified that recent improvement to address areas of weakness at the time of the last subject inspection has been good; the capacity for further improvement is very good if the issues about staffing can be resolved effectively.
- The subject specialist, who has a visionary approach to teaching RE, is providing some good leadership in terms of developing an exciting curriculum and beginning to transform teaching and learning.
- There are clear arrangements for monitoring the provision. Routine observation of teaching takes place and, unusually for RE, the monitoring of the quality of the curriculum is good. It will be important to sustain this pattern of monitoring as the new curriculum is implemented to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the progress of pupils across the whole ability range.
- Good use has been made of the support within the local authority and this has, for example, helped with the development of its assessment practice. Once the department has a more robust set of assessment

data available, it will be important to analyse patterns of achievement more rigorously.

- There are issues with the distribution of the subject accommodation with the two specialist rooms currently at opposite ends of the school. Some very good use is being made of whiteboard technology in lessons but this is not consistent across all teaching. While the department is well-stocked with text book materials, the new curriculum and teaching approaches will require additional and more interactive resources.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

The subject currently makes a good contribution to many aspects of the promotion of community cohesion but recognises in the subject action plan that there is scope to go further. The underlying ethos of learning in the subject promotes a positive attitude towards diversity and the subject is not reluctant to engage with many of the more controversial issues about religion. Pupils usually demonstrate an interest in, and respect for, differences of opinion and value the opportunity to investigate the impact which religion has in the modern world. While there are some planned opportunities to use resources in the local area to enrich learning and promote community cohesion, the action plan recognises this is an area for further development.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in RE is good. The full course GCSE class has a relatively high proportion of boys reflecting the efforts made to secure their interest in the subject. There is also a high proportion of pupils from black and minority ethnic group taking the qualification, again reflecting the way the subject has sought to be inclusive. While more attention needs to be given to using data in RE to evaluate the performance of different ability groups, good use of setting arrangements ensure teaching strategies are varied enough to engage a wide range of learning styles.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- monitoring the impact on standards and achievement of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and assessments
- reviewing the provision for RE at Key Stage 4 and in Year 9 to ensure it provides maximum benefit for all pupils
- securing specialist teaching for all as soon as practicable and linking this to a resolution of the current accommodation issues
- extending the planned opportunities to use resources in the local area to enrich learning and promote community cohesion.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in citizenship is good overall.

- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the key areas of the curriculum especially human rights and responsibilities, the significance of the media, crime and justice, and diversity in the United Kingdom. They are less well informed about the role of the European Union, the functioning of the economy, consumer rights, trades unions and the Commonwealth.
- All have the opportunity to research topics on the internet as well as use books, newspapers and pamphlets and are expected to demonstrate their communication skills through debates, discussions and in writing.
- Some pupils are given very good opportunities to participate and take responsible action in citizenship. The members of the school council in particular organise fund-raising events and have made partnerships with other schools in England and abroad. The new house system is extending responsibilities to the wider school community and enabling more pupils to take leadership roles.

Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Pupils find citizenship very interesting and often challenging. Lessons are well planned and interactive whiteboards are used to good effect. Teachers use a wide range of approaches including role play, simulation, discussion, debates and pupil presentations. Relevant and topical resources are used well including news clips and reflections on youth culture.
- Teachers understand how to deal with sensitive and controversial issues and pupils enjoy the challenge of debating topics such as refugees and asylum seekers, racism and child abuse.
- Teachers have a good understanding of how well pupils are doing. They mark books regularly and provide helpful comments, grades and targets. Pupils' involvement in community activities is not formally assessed although many receive awards and certificates for this work.
- Pupils engage very well with their learning. They work cooperatively in groups, are prepared to voice their own opinions and listen respectfully to the opinions of others.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- The core programme is enriched by supportive work in other subjects. For instance: religions and cultures, prejudice and discrimination in religious education; identities and diversity in art; and, cultural differences in music and English.
- There is good scope for revisiting some key topics such as democracy, rights and responsibilities and the media across both key stages.
- All pupils are able to develop their research skills through the core programme but not all get opportunities to participate in community activities beyond the school.

Leadership and management of citizenship

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory with many good features.

- The teacher in charge of citizenship has not yet been designated the subject coordinator and no members of the team have attended subject specific training. Nevertheless, subject leadership is discharged effectively.
- Teachers' lessons are observed by their line managers and they are given useful developmental comments. Pupils' work is regularly scrutinised and analysed by the teacher in charge of citizenship who then sets appropriate departmental targets in response to the analysis.
- The citizenship department is staffed by a mix of well qualified teachers and those with gaps in their timetable which has led to some instability in the team.

Subject issue

Moorside plans very well for teaching about diversity and identities in Britain. Diversity is addressed at both key stages in citizenship lessons, through other subjects and in high quality pupil generated display work. Pupils have good opportunities to discuss and consider controversial issues including work on refugees and asylum seekers, the history of immigration to the United Kingdom, and customs, cultures and diversity within England. Pupils reflect very well on their learning in this area and can articulate their own views and those of others.

Inclusion

Pupils of all abilities are catered for in citizenship lessons. Teaching assistants help them where appropriate and teachers plan for the different needs of pupils in the class. All are encouraged to participate actively in lessons and group work is used particularly well to secure this. Not all pupils have opportunities to engage in wider citizenship activities in the community and school, although this is likely to improve with the introduction of the house system. At Key Stage 4 all pupils attend citizenship lessons but the benefit of good enrichment through other subjects such as history and geography, can be restricted by their option choice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enhancing the quality of subject leadership by ensuring the subject leader is sufficiently well supported and resourced
- providing subject specific training for the citizenship team
- revisiting the curriculum so all elements are addressed in sufficient depth.

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

As we explained in our previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and, in the case of RE, to 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
Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspectors