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Mrs Alison Saunders  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Saunders

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 December 2007 to look at work in 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 way the subject contributes 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five part lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is good with some outstanding features.

- GCSE results are consistently well above national averages and pupils make good, and sometimes very good, progress. The proportion of pupils who attained the top grades in the full course in 2007 was significantly higher than those obtained by pupils nationally. In the short course, the proportion who attained the highest A\*-A grades was slightly below the national average, but the proportion who obtained A\*-C grades was well above. Standards in the sixth form as reflected in public examination results are also well above average.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above expectations of the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus. The majority of pupils are able to give informed accounts of religions and can express their own insights confidently. The most able pupils can compare, contrast and evaluate religious and non-religious perspectives and express their own balanced viewpoints.
- Pupils' personal development in the context of RE is very good. It makes a significant impact on pupils' lives. The subject has a very strong link with the school's wider programme of support for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are very aware of the importance of appreciating religious and cultural diversity in contemporary Britain. They show respect for diversity and are able to talk confidently about their own views. Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and they have very positive attitudes to RE.

### Quality of teaching and learning of RE

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Challenging teaching enables pupils to make good or better progress in learning. Specialist teachers have very good subject knowledge which they use skilfully to probe pupils' knowledge, thereby deepening pupils' understanding of religion and its impact. A very positive ethos for learning is established in lessons and relationships with pupils are positive.
- Lessons are planned meticulously. Careful account is taken of pupils' different needs, and in the lessons observed, the plans were implemented well. Contributions from all staff to planning and on-going evaluation help to maintain the high quality. The effective planning also ensures that learning proceeds at a good pace and non-specialist teachers are well supported in their teaching.
- Lessons, typically, have a wide range of tasks and activities which engage and stimulate pupils' interest. Pupils enjoy discussions and working collaboratively. There is good use of homework to extend learning.
- Assessment is good. It is an essential component of planning and teaching. Pupils have a clear understanding of assessment criteria which are referred to at regular intervals. This means that pupils play an active part in learning and are keen to undertake self and peer-assessment. Teachers' marking and verbal feedback enables pupils to know how to improve their work. The tracking of pupils' progress enables teachers to identify underachievement and take effective action.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The schemes of work take good account of the revised Hertfordshire agreed syllabus. What is to be studied and how learning will take place are identified in considerable detail in units of work in Years 7 and 8. The units of work benefit pupils particularly well because each lesson

has a question framed as a line of enquiry and learning outcomes are clearly shared with them.

- The provision of accredited courses in Years 9, 10 and 11 is good and work for these groups of pupils is also planned well. The department has successfully introduced a GCSE short course in Year 9 which is suitably matched to pupils' needs and interests. The subject and senior leaders recognise that provision for these pupils, who will be in Year 11 in September 2008, needs to be coherent and build on their prior achievement.
- The provision of RE in the sixth form includes accredited courses, with an increasing number of students opting for AS and A2 levels. More widely, students have a range of opportunities, including visiting speakers' contributions, to explore religious, philosophical and ethical issues in greater depth.
- The RE department's strong links with citizenship and other curriculum areas has a positive impact on pupils' learning and personal development. There is good enrichment of the curriculum through visits to places of worship and visiting speakers to the school.

### Leadership and management of RE

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features.

- The head of department is an enthusiastic subject leader who provides a very good role model for staff and pupils. Over recent years, under her determined guidance and direction, pupils' achievement and standards have improved significantly. Meticulous planning and its implementation are notable elements in this success story. Good support is provided to enable new and non-specialist staff to teach effectively.
- Careful and wide ranging monitoring, including the canvassing of pupils' views, results in accurate self-evaluation and the identification of the right priorities for further improvement. Assessment information is used effectively to track pupils' progress and to set realistic targets for teachers' performance.
- The department is very well organised and resources are used carefully.

### The promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a very positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils demonstrate a lively interest in exploring issues related to diversity in religion and have good awareness and understanding about this diversity. Pupils have good opportunities to express their own views about the role of religion in the modern world and they feel that their opinions are valued. The department makes a strong contribution to the whole school's approach to community cohesion which links well with local and wider communities.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good. All pupils are encouraged to participate in lessons. Carefully structured tasks and in-class support are used well to ensure that all pupils have good access to learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress at a similar rate to their peers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that for pupils who are in Year 11 from September 2008, curriculum provision secures effective continuity and progression in their learning.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala  
Her Majesty's Inspector