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07 December 2007

Mr Jonathon Wilding
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Dear Mr Wilding

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit 5 and 6 December 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my 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 pupils, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in RE is good.

- GCSE results in both the short and full GCSE course continue to improve. Although results are below the national average, this represents good achievement for those students entered for these qualifications. Some of the work produced by students taking the GCSE full course is of high quality and demonstrates good achievement. Current assessment data indicates that most students are on track to meet their target grades.

- Achievement in Years 7 and 8 is good; students are able to explore important contemporary religious and ethical issues with confidence. They show good skills in comparing major religious traditions and are able to relate their findings to their own experiences and ideas.
- RE makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development. They find RE very interesting, greatly appreciating the opportunity to explore religious and cultural diversity. All students are very positive about subject, reporting that they enjoy the challenge and the depth of thinking required of them.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teaching is characterised by excellent subject knowledge, combined with very high expectations. Very skilful use is made of strategies to engage students in deeper levels of analysis; students are encouraged at every opportunity to think about how and what they are learning.
- Excellent account is taken of how young people learn. Teaching focuses on developing their thinking skills and this is reflected in the very well conceived structure of the learning. Tasks often incorporate opportunities for students to develop their ability to research and write independently.
- Planning for students of different abilities is sharp and tasks cover a wide variety of learning styles allowing all to achieve as well as they can. As a result, all students, including those with learning difficulties, make good progress.
- Students work well together. Many concentrate for sustained periods, engaging in group work in a mature and sensible manner. For example, the discussion work of some students in Year 7, who were interpreting different sources of evidence about beliefs in God, was of a high standard.
- There are effective mechanisms in place to assess students' progress. Very well conceived assessment tasks enable students to show what they know and can do. Worked is marked regularly and useful guidance given on how to improve. Excellent emphasis is placed on using the information gained from assessments to plan subsequent work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- All students in Year 9 and at Key Stage 4 follow an accredited course in RE although only a small number are entered for the examinations.
- The curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is imaginative and thoughtful and meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The schemes of work are mapped against the syllabus to ensure coverage of the requirements. A new curriculum is in draft form based on the revised 2007 agreed syllabus.
- Strong links are forged with other curriculum areas. Students studying textiles have completed a tapestry based on religious symbolism. Links

with citizenship have complemented well the students' work on Martin Luther King. However, there are too few opportunities for enrichment activities in terms of fieldwork and the use of visitors.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- A pattern of high expectations, systematic teaching and effective leadership, has led to the subject being held in high regard across the school. The subject leader has a clear understanding of the priorities for improvement based on good monitoring and evaluation of the provision.
- She regularly provides professional development opportunities for the non-specialists in the department. She has established a successful pattern of joint working with her colleagues to ensure the process of developing the curriculum planning is productive and effective.

Community Cohesion

RE makes a useful contribution to the school's promotion of community cohesion. Issues affecting the local, national and global community have high profile in the RE curriculum particularly in Year 9 and Key Stage 4. The opportunities for students to engage directly with representatives from local religious and cultural communities are limited.

Inclusion

Teachers recognise the needs of students who have learning difficulties or disabilities and set appropriate work for them. Planning usually takes into account the needs of all students. The varied approaches to learning ensure that all students make good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring the possibility of offering all Key Stage 4 students the opportunity to accredit their work in RE
- extending the use of field work and visits in RE.

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

Jacqueline K Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector