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Dear Mrs Mortimore

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education (RE) and Design and Technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Andrew Lyons, Additional Inspector, on 21 and 22 January 2008 to look at work in RE and D&T.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the RE 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

### Religious education

The overall effectiveness of RE is judged to be good with many outstanding features.

### Achievement and standards

The achievement of students in RE is good with a number of outstanding characteristics.

- Full course GCSE results in RE over the past three years have been very good. The proportion of students gaining A\*-C grades has usually been well above the national average; this represents outstanding achievement.

The gap between the performance of boys and girls is often much narrower than that seen nationally. In 2007 full course results dipped significantly and there was some underachievement but a thorough analysis of the reasons has been carried out and action taken to address the issue. The department's data indicates that students in the current Year 11 should achieve well. While the results for the students who take the GCSE short course are well below the national average, this represents satisfactory achievement for the cohort entered.

- Students' achievement at Key Stage 3 in 2007 was impressive with over 80% gaining Level 5 or above by the end of Year 9. The major strength at both key stages is the way the students' achievement is focused on the development and application of the higher order learning skills of the subject. They demonstrate, for example, an impressive ability: to enquire into and evaluate religious concepts; to recognise and explain diversity and interpretation within religion; and, to understand the motivation behind, and significance of, religious practice.
- Following the review of the curriculum in Year 9, there is now a need to ensure the overall breadth of the students' knowledge and understanding at Key Stage 3 reflects the expectations of the Hampshire agreed syllabus.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is outstanding. Students develop high levels of confidence and independence as learners. All aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding; in particular, their ability to relate religious and wider ideas to their own experience and thinking is of a very high order. The students demonstrate a particularly effective appreciation of the diversity and relevance of religion in the contemporary world. For example, in one Year 8 lesson, students showed a highly sophisticated understanding of the religious issues linked to the events of 9/11.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Much of the teaching and learning in RE is outstanding and based on a consistent and coherent application of the cycle of learning underpinning the locally agreed syllabus. Its strengths include: very high expectations; very effective use of discussion and questioning; energetic and dynamic teaching; impressive subject knowledge; stimulating use of ICT; and, very positive and productive classroom management.
- Careful attention is paid to the varying learning needs of students to ensure that activities and resources enable all students to achieve well. The use of strategies to engage boys is particularly effective. The focus on developing literacy is also impressive with careful attention paid to supporting independent well-structured written work.
- As a result, learning is often outstanding. Behaviour in lessons is very good and students have a very positive attitude to learning and to the subject. They work very well together and develop the ability to express personal views in balanced and well-argued ways.
- Occasionally, where teaching does not vary the pace and pattern of activities enough, students find it hard to concentrate and the pace of

learning is slightly less effective. The use made of ICT by students in RE is limited.

- Assessment is skilfully integrated into the pattern of the work and, as a result, students have a very clear view of the nature of learning in the subject, their progress, and how they can improve.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is good.

- The curriculum pays very close attention to the requirements and fundamental approach to learning of the locally agreed syllabus. This drives the provision at Key Stage 3 but is also increasingly being applied at GCSE. There is good provision for students to take GCSE with a high proportion opting for the full course.
- The arrangements for GCSE in Key Stage 4 currently mean the full and short courses are taught together to mixed ability classes and are delivered on a very tight allocation of time. Additional sessions are run to support those opting for the full course. The high quality of the results in recent years is all the more impressive given this pattern of provision.
- In response to the dip in results in full course GCSE in 2007 and changes in the pattern of the examination, students now start the GCSE in Year 9. This is sensible move but the department needs to ensure its plans to enter some students at the end of Year 10 and again in Year 11 are appropriate.
- The impact of the early start for GCSE is that the Key Stage 3 provision is limited to years 7 and 8. Great care is taken to ensure the selection of the topics motivate and engage students. Very good use is made of the exemplar schemes of work produced by the local authority, some of which were written by the head of department herself. However, the rationale being used to select and sequence the areas of enquiry is not entirely clear and there is scope to ensure the current provision reflects the breadth of study in the agreed syllabus more closely.
- A strength of the curriculum planning is the close attention paid to progression within each unit of work and to the use of levels to help ensure the work is pitched at the range of abilities within each year group.
- Very limited use made of links with local religious communities in order to enrich the curriculum and this is a target for development in the subject improvement plan.

### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are outstanding.

- The subject benefits from the visionary leadership of an outstanding head of department who is very well supported by her specialist subject colleague and the senior leadership team. Her skills have been recognised both locally and nationally. The department has beacon status in the local authority; the subject leader is also an advanced skills teacher and has recently been appointed as a regional subject adviser supporting the roll out of the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

- The success of the subject is, in part, rooted in a very clearly articulated commitment to a challenging model of religious enquiry. The subject leader has an impressive appreciation of current best practice in the subject and has played a key role in supporting the development of the subject in Hampshire and beyond.
- The arrangements for monitoring, reviewing and improvement planning are coherent and clearly focused both on raising achievement and supporting wider whole school priorities. The pattern of professional training within the department is proving highly effective, most notably in promoting the development of the second-in-department from a non-specialist into a highly competent specialist. The subject has taken a lead in professional training across the school.
- Resources are well managed and good use is made of the accommodation for the subject. Some use has to be made of non-specialist teachers in Year 7 but efforts are made to ensure they are well-supported. Access for students to ICT to support learning in RE is limited.

### The promotion of community cohesion

RE plays a positive and leading role in the school in promoting community cohesion. It is directly involved in a wider local authority initiative linked to social cohesion working in partnership with local primary schools. The approach to learning in RE has ensured students can engage effectively with contemporary issues related to the role of religion in community. It has also encouraged students to adopt a mature, robust and evaluative approach towards an understanding of, and respect for, diversity. However insufficient use is made of links with local religious communities to enrich the students' learning.

### Inclusion

Inclusion in RE is very good and is reflected in the high achievement of all groups of students. Boys do particularly well in RE and the pattern of teaching and learning in lessons pays high regard to the importance of addressing the needs of all learners. There is limited use of learning support in RE lessons except for students for whom English is an additional language.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the selection and sequencing of areas of enquiry in Years 7 and 8 to ensure they reflect the breadth of study of the locally agreed syllabus
- considering the arrangements for the delivery of GCSE to ensure they are suitable and will continue to support high achievement
- developing the use of fieldwork and visitors in the subject.

## Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

Attainment is average and progress is satisfactory in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, attainment is below average and is depressed by the boys' very low GCSE results.

- Almost all students follow a D&T subject to examination level, a requirement for a specialist technology college. Last year the combined results at GCSE level for D&T were significantly below the national average.
- At Key Stage 3, students have a good range of experiences in D&T which builds on the broadly average standard of students' attainment in their primary schools. Progress across the key stage is generally satisfactory, although boys do not make as much progress they could, or as much as the girls. Attainment at the end of the key stage is broadly average with girls' standards often higher than those of the boys.
- The combined GCSE results masks the fact that boys' results were very low whereas girls' results were generally in line with the national average. Results in Graphic Products were higher than the other subjects, being broadly in line with national averages. Students had a series of events that interfered with the continuity of their learning in D&T over the years including, a fire, a loss of coursework, temporary accommodation and then a move into a brand new building. Students' achievement is in line with their other subjects.
- In GCSE Graphic Products, 45 students were entered and 56% gained A\* to C grades although two failed to gain a grade. In GCSE Resistant Materials, 35 students were entered, all gained a grade and 34% gained A\* to C grades. In GCSE Textiles, 19 students entered, all gained a grade and 37% gained an A\* to C grade. These results were disappointing as previous textiles results had been very good. In GCSE Food Studies, 51 students entered with 47% gaining an A\* to C grade. Applied Engineering, which is run in conjunction with the local college, had 24 candidates, all gained a grade and 50% gained an A\* to C grade. The Electronics course entered 23 students for the GCSE examination, all candidates passed and 43% gained an A\* to C grade.
- At Key Stage 3, students enter the school with a sound D&T capability developed in the primary phase. They start off with an introductory module that builds on their previous experiences, develops their designing skills, and prepares them for working in specialist materials. They design and make products in resistant materials (wood, metal and plastics), textiles, graphic materials, electronics and food. At the end of the key stage they have covered the National Curriculum programme of study although attainment in some of the theoretical aspects, like structures, is weak. Although students are prepared to attain the higher National Curriculum levels, too few, particularly boys, get there.
- Students are able to study and create a good range of textile and food products in line with the national recommendation.

## Quality of teaching and learning

Overall the quality of teaching and learning in D&T is satisfactory.

- Generally teaching is satisfactory, and often good, but there are occasionally unsatisfactory lessons. Students in Key Stage 3 told the inspector that in all the lessons they went to there was some low level disruption, and this was confirmed by some of the observations. In a Year 7 lesson some students, particularly boys, came ill equipped to learn. Learning attitudes were poor and a number came without equipment to use, like pens and pencils. Here the teacher had to be demanding and constantly remind students to concentrate. If this was not done effectively, then the lesson pace dropped and learning slowed. Students who were able to become independent learners, particularly girls, were able to ignore the interruptions and make good progress. In lessons later in the key stage learning is generally better, but there still remain a number of boys whose behaviour needs careful managing to keep them on task. The girls ignore this and work conscientiously.
- Teaching is better in Key Stage 4. Students are more committed to the courses they are following because they have chosen the materials in which they are working and they concentrate harder. Students said they liked D&T because 'You can get on independently in a relaxed atmosphere'. Teachers know their subjects well and enable students to complete their coursework to clear deadlines. There are excellent ICT based assessment procedures throughout the years and teachers use them well. Students then know how well they are doing, work to targets for completion and make progress getting there. This is starting to have an impact on standards.
- Students, particularly those in Key Stage 4, are very appreciative of the commitment of their teachers because they know they can always ask for help out of lessons. Teachers give freely of their time to ensure that students can complete their coursework to the highest standards possible.
- Relationships are good. Most students get along well together, but some are insensitive to the needs of others and demand too much teachers' time, stopping other learners getting their fair share. Attitudes improve as students move through the school.
- The electronic projector is often well used but projecting onto a poorly cleaned whiteboard limits its impact. This provision needs to be reviewed. There are some high quality learning resources prepared by the teachers, particularly the head of department, but these are not universally used across the department.
- ICT is effectively used in coursework, with good presentation, but its use across the department is uneven. Homework is generally set regularly, but not all is sufficiently demanding as it does not match the learning needs of the different students in the class.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The time given to D&T in the first three years is similar to most schools. In

Years 7 and 8 a series of modules cover graphic products; manufacturing products in wood, metal and plastics; textiles; food and electronics. These are supported by good use of computer aided design (CAD) and computer aided manufacturing (CAM). The planned series of activities is well structured.

- In Year 9, the school has rightly reviewed its provision to try to maintain and improve students' interest. They have done this by allowing students to choose three from the five subjects they follow in the earlier years so that they have more time to cover each in more depth. This strategy is beginning to improve boys' motivation and behaviour.
- At Key Stage 4, students are given a good choice of technology GCSE courses in Resistant Materials, Graphic Products, Food Studies, Textiles and Electronics. Child Development is also offered.
- Discussions with students in every year showed that they enjoy their D&T lessons because they recognise that they make progress lesson after lesson.

## Leadership and management

Leadership of D&T department is satisfactory with some good features.

- The school is committed to D&T. You and your governors support the development of the subject in the school. The head of department works tirelessly for the department both within the school and as part of the community dimension of the schools' specialist status.
- The new facilities provide a good environment for learning, with very good displays. Access to high quality ICT provision is provided through both fixed and mobile computers. Teachers and students are enjoying the improved facilities and the good range of equipment is being well utilised.
- In line with technology college requirements, the head of department works closely with senior managers in developing new strategies both for in-school and community involvement. He innovates with some extremely good developments, for example, the outstanding assessment procedures. The school is reviewing its management structure to get a broader range of skills in departmental management and to ensure that innovation is consistent across the department.

## Inclusion

Students' relationships are broadly satisfactory, but some students are insensitive to the feelings and needs of others deliberately misbehaving in lessons. Students with special educational needs are well supported and make similar progress to the rest of the group.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards of achievement, particularly in Years 7 and 8, by ensuring that every class is well managed and that learners make the progress of which they are capable, boys especially
- sharing the good practices in the department more effectively so that they are embedded throughout
- strengthening the day to day management of learning and behaviour.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE and D&T in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Authority and, in the case of RE, SACRE and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine  
Her Majesty's Inspector