

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs J Radbourne
Headteacher
The Grove School
Newcastle Road
Market Drayton
Shropshire
TF9 1HF

Dear Mrs Radbourne

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit 21 and 22 January 2008 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 students, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in RE is satisfactory and improving.

- GCSE results in both the short and full course are improving. Although results are below the national average, this represents satisfactory and sometimes good achievement for those students entered for these qualifications. Current assessment data indicates that most students are on track to meet their target grades.
- Results for the small number of students who are entered for A level continue to rise. Standards attained in 2007 are at the national average, representing satisfactory achievement.

- Standards in RE at Key Stage 3 are below average. Whilst students' achievement is uneven it is satisfactory overall. Students develop an appropriate understanding of the beliefs and practices of two major faiths and are developing their appreciation of the impact that religion has on people's ways of life. Their ability to explain and analyse religion is sometimes limited by the variability in teaching and in the quality of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. While they can express their ideas orally this not always reflected in the quality of their written work. Some higher ability students are not being extended sufficiently because some of the tasks set are not challenging enough.
- RE makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They find RE very interesting, greatly appreciating the time spent in exploring religious and cultural diversity.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- The best teaching has a number of good features. Teachers have positive relationships with students and demonstrate good subject knowledge. Skilful use is made of strategies to engage students and to develop positive attitudes towards learning.
- Students generally work well together. Many concentrate for sustained periods, engaging in group work in a mature and sensible manner. However, in some lessons there are issues with the management of those students, especially boys, who have a less positive attitude towards learning.
- There are appropriate mechanisms in place to assess students' progress. Work is marked with guidance sometimes given on how to improve. Less emphasis is placed on developing students' understanding of their overall progress and on using the information gained from assessments to plan more challenging work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- All students at Key Stage 4 follow the full GCSE course with the majority of the students entered for the exam. The remainder are entered for the short course examination. There are opportunities for students to continue their study of RE to A Level.
- The curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The schemes of work are mapped against the syllabus to ensure coverage of the requirements.
- The provision at Key Stage 3 does not as yet have the necessary continuity and progression so that students' prior learning and achievements are built on, and extended, across the key stage, and this leads to the unevenness in student achievement.
- Effective links are forged with other curriculum areas. Students studying art have completed ceramics based on religious artefacts. Citizenship has linked well with the students' work in RE on crime and

punishment. There are good opportunities for enrichment activities in terms of visits and visitors, particularly from well established international links.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The subject leader has successfully raised the profile of RE across the school. As a result the subject makes a positive contribution to the students' personal development and to the wider life of the school. The subject is well supported by the senior leadership team.
- The roles and responsibilities for RE are clear and appropriate strategies are in place to monitor and evaluate provision. There is scope to extend the analysis of data and the outcomes of monitoring to ensure that strategies for raising standards and achievement in the subject are addressed more systematically.
- There is insufficient provision to meet the full statutory requirements for RE in the sixth form.

Community Cohesion

RE makes an effective 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 regular and growing in number. The subject has taken the initiative in developing a number of international links which help develop students' understanding of the global community.

Inclusion

Many aspects of the provision for RE reflect a positive approach to inclusion; for example, access to the individual learning centre and in-class support 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:

- providing more structured opportunities for students to develop their ideas into written work
- further develop the use of assessment opportunities to inform students about their progress and to plan subsequent work
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum in order to incorporate clearer progression and continuity
- ensuring the statutory requirements for RE in the sixth form are met.

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