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Dear Mr Gimber

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education and Design & Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Paul Hancock HMI on 04 and 05 February 2008 to look at work in design & technology (D&T) and religious education (RE).

As outlined in the 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

### Religious Education

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

### Achievement and standards

The achievement of students in RE is satisfactory and improving.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with the national average and have risen considerably over the previous three years. Since 2004 all students follow the short GCSE course with a small number studying the full course. The progress made by Year 10 and 11 students in the

lessons observed was good. They demonstrated, for example, a clear understanding of the relationship between religion, philosophy and ethics. Students were able to apply their understanding to their study of euthanasia. Whilst students undertaking the full course were able to apply their knowledge of Christian perspectives on heaven and hell to create their own piece of art work depicting their own views.

- 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.
- While students' achievement at Key Stage 3 is uneven, it is satisfactory overall with students attaining average standards. Students develop a broad understanding of the diversity of religion within their local community and in Britain. They also have a growing appreciation of the impact that religion has on the way of life of individuals and communities. Some students make good progress and demonstrate, for example, the ability to interpret, evaluate and apply their understanding of key features of a religion. However, some higher ability students are not being extended sufficiently because some of the tasks they are set lack challenge. Less able students are often well-supported and, as a result, make satisfactory progress.
- The personal development of students in RE is good. Most show a lively interest in religion and a keen respect for the beliefs and practices of others. They value the subject and recognise the contribution it makes to the development of understanding, respect and tolerance. Very good relationships exist between the students and staff, which contribute to an extremely positive learning environment.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Much teaching is characterised by clear structuring of lessons, positive relationships with students and good subject knowledge. In the best lessons the tasks are challenging, teachers use appropriate questions to structure students' work. Stimulating and imaginative resources are used to good effect. As a result, the teaching often emphasises successfully the relevance of the subject to contemporary issues.
- Care is taken to appeal to students' different learning styles and to provide support and challenge where appropriate. Students debating skills, and their ability to engage in collaborative and independent learning, have all improved owing to the introduction of 'Critical Skills Challenges', particularly in key stages 3 and 4.
- Considerable attention has been paid to developing assessment arrangements in RE. Some good use is made of self and peer assessment, this helps students to evaluate their own, and others work. Structured, manageable and levelled assessment tasks have been recently introduced. However, as yet judgements are not reliable or robust enough, particularly in Key Stage 3 and more use needs to be made of the outcomes to inform planning and ensure learning is

pitched correctly. Although there are some good examples of evaluative, marking this is inconsistent across the department.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The overall curriculum for RE broadly meets the requirements of the agreed syllabus. Students engage with religious, moral, social and global issues from a variety of standpoints. There is a good balance of work between the two attainment targets. Since September 2007 schemes of work and programmes of study across all Key Stages are being updated to ensure an exciting RE curriculum for students of all backgrounds and abilities.
- There is good provision for all students in Key Stage 4 to study an accredited course. However, the post-16 provision does not fully meet statutory requirements. Insufficient curriculum time is devoted to enable students to study all of the six areas required by the locally agreed syllabus. However, an increasing number of students have the opportunity to study a course on the Philosophy of Religion and Ethics to A Level.
- The high priority given to students' systematic spiritual development enables them to use stillness and reflection to deepen their understanding and insight; encouraging them to express their own beliefs and ideas using a variety of forms of expression. Visits and visitors from a diversity of religious traditions greatly enrich students learning.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The department is beginning to recover from a period of uncertainty and change owing to a number of changes in departmental leadership.
- The recently appointed head of department is an effective classroom teacher. She has strong views which should help the new team to develop a clear sense of direction. Together with the support of the senior leadership team, she has ensured that RE is well regarded in the school. She has begun to meld a cohesive team, establishing a successful pattern of joint working with her colleagues ensuring the process of developing the newly revised curriculum planning is productive and effective. An effective subject evaluation was produced to support the preparation for this visit with an accurate evaluation of the subject's current position within the school.
- The department has two specialist teachers and one part time member of staff and is very well organised and resourced. A well-planned improvement plan shows key milestones and measurable success criteria clearly linked to improving teaching, learning and raising attainment. The team is beginning to make more use of data to analyse student performance and target under-achievement. However, the arrangements for monitoring the quality of the provision are at an early stage of development.

- All students spoke positively about the subject and its contribution to their personal development.

### The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution on the promotion of community cohesion; the teaching encourages respect for diversity and the development of students' confidence to express personal views about religion. Students say the subject strongly promotes tolerance and respect within the school. They particularly like the unit on Cumbrian Spirituality, as it allows them to understand how and why people express their beliefs in different ways. There are good opportunities to link to the wider local community through fieldwork and contact with local religious groups.

### Inclusion

Many aspects of the provision for RE reflect a positive approach to inclusion; for example, the in-class and in unit support for students with learning difficulties studying RE are often good. A number of students with severe and profound learning difficulties and physical/medical difficulties study RE as part of the ASDAN transition challenge module. 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:

- improving the quality, reliability and consistency of marking and assessment, particularly at Key Stage 3.

### Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of Design and Technology (D&T) was judged to be satisfactory and quickly improving.

### Achievement and standards

- The department accurately identifies achievement and standards to be satisfactory and getting better. Many students start at the school with below average attainment in D&T and good progress developing D&T capability was evident during the visit. GCSE results have improved significantly in 2007, although they remain below the national average and best performing subjects in the school.
- Students are making more rapid progress because the significant changes made in the last two years are starting to impact. Boys and girls are included in the full range of D&T options more effectively. Standards are rising at Key Stage 3 with the introduction new schemes of work which include more challenging project work. New structures which allow students to achieve more highly from year to year together with new systems to track individual progress are playing a major part in the drive for improvement.

- Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities including those with severe learning difficulties are achieving equally well. Attitudes and behaviour in the D&T lessons seen during the visit were consistently good and more challenging pupils were fully engaged. D&T is making a good contribution to the personal development and well being of students by helping them gain more confidence and self esteem.

#### Quality of teaching and learning

- The quality of teaching and learning in D&T is satisfactory overall. The school knows the proportion of good and better teaching is rising and is right to expect quality to be consistently good in the near future.
- Lessons using the revised structures and systems are rigorously planned and delivered at a good pace. Work is more challenging and pitched at the right level for needs and abilities, another indication recent change is improving quality. New schemes of work are sharply focussed on developing D&T capability over time.
- Assessment practice has improved and D&T capability is regularly recorded against national curriculum levels. Data is well analysed and individual progress tracked closely.

#### Quality of the curriculum

- The quality of the curriculum is good. Recent changes are meeting needs and interests well with students using a good range of components and materials to design and make products. Computer aided design and manufacture is particularly well covered, for example in a Year 10 lesson which captured the interest and concentration of students for long periods of time.
- The coverage of key design skills such as the generation of ideas and routine evaluation has improved. The new Key Stage 3 curriculum is well constructed to meet the demands of the national programmes of study, and at Key Stage 4\5, course specifications. Coursework is based on a good range of up-to-date projects with business and enterprise ethos and practice successfully integrated into project work. Recent improvements in the accommodation and resources are well matched to subject and student needs.

#### Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of D&T are good.

- Intervention by senior managers and a new subject leader is raising achievement and the quality of provision. The subject is moving in the right direction at a good pace.
- The shared vision by all the leaders and managers involved in new developments is a particularly strong feature. Performance is closely monitored and the right actions are taken to make significant improvements on a short timescale. Another strong feature is rigorous and accurate subject self-evaluation.

## Inclusion

- Boys and girls are more effectively included in the full range of GCSE courses.
- Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in D&T is very good and they are equally involved in practical work which they thoroughly enjoy.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement and standards to match the best performing subjects in the school.

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

As we explained in the 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

Jacqui Wordsworth  
Her Majesty's Inspectors