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07 February 2008

Mr J Burton
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Dear Mr Burton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05 and 06 February 2008 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 outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is good with outstanding features.

- GCSE short course results are above, and for the full course, well above, average. In 2007, the proportion of pupils who attained A*-A grades in both examinations was also well above average. Pupils make at least good progress by the end of Year 11 because they are able to build well on the knowledge and understanding attained in Year 9.
- At Key Stage 3, pupils attain standards that are broadly in line with, or in some case above, the Solihull agreed syllabus expectations. Pupils have a good conceptual understanding of religions studied and have

developed suitable attitudes and skills identified in the syllabus. Across the three years of study, pupils are given good opportunities to reflect on beliefs they have encountered and are able to express their own views in an informed way.

- Standards attained by girls are higher than those attained by boys at both key stages. Teaching has been modified to take account of this gap, with the result that the gap is narrowing.
- The contribution of RE to pupils' personal development is very good. It makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are keen to understand and appreciate religious and cultural diversity in contemporary Britain. They show respect for diversity, including that found in the school community, and are able to talk very confidently about their own views. Pupils behave well in lessons and the great majority have positive attitudes to RE.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Subject specialists use their knowledge very effectively. Lessons are planned meticulously, taking account of the pupils' different needs. The plans are implemented well and flexibly so that there is room for dealing with pupils' questions as they arise in lessons. Teachers make learning interesting and most pupils' sense of enjoyment is very strong.
- There are high expectations for learning and behaviour and a good variety of tasks and activities which engage and motivate the pupils. In Years 10 and 11, pupils particularly enjoy debating and thinking about issues which require higher order skills of evaluation and interpretation. The emphasis on developing good thinking skills was also evident in a Year 9 lesson observed. Homework is used well to enhance learning and this makes an important contribution to standards attained.
- Assessment is very good. Assessment tasks are carefully structured and the criteria for marking are shared with pupils. This keeps them engaged in their learning and informs them about their progress. Assessment also informs teachers' planning and is used well to report to parents. The tracking pupils' progress enables underachievement to be identified and rectified in good time. Pupils receive detailed feedback on the outcomes of their assessed tasks, as a result that they have a clear idea about what they need to do to attain higher levels and grades. Teacher assessments are moderated to ensure consistency of judgements.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The schemes of work take good account of the Solihull agreed syllabus. The subject leader has worked hard to devise a curriculum that matches the pupils' needs and interests. The use of a bridging unit on philosophy between Year 9 and Year 10 ensures a smooth transition between the key stages.

- The provision of accredited courses in Years 10 and 11 is good and builds progressively on what pupils have learned in earlier years.
- The subject leader is keen to review and modify the curriculum at Key Stage 3, in the light of the revised locally agreed syllabus.
- The RE curriculum is enriched by the school's 'immersion days' when the usual timetable is suspended. Although there have been visits to places of worship in the past, these are not as frequent and not enough visitors are invited from different religious groups to meet with pupils.

Leadership and management of RE

Leadership and management are good with outstanding features.

- The subject leader has a relentless focus on raising standards and improving pupils' achievement and the impact of this is very good. The subject is managed with enthusiasm and integrity so that the majority of pupils have positive attitudes. There is a strong sense of team work and collaboration in the department. Well judged support is given by the subject leader to ensure consistency in teaching and learning.
- Monitoring and evaluation is thorough and the priorities for improvement are accurately identified. Assessment information is used effectively to track pupils' progress and to set challenging targets for improving performance.
- The department is very well organised and resources are used carefully.

The promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Pupils speak very positively about the way RE provides opportunities to discuss religious diversity. A conference organised by the Solihull SACRE in December 2007 to discuss how community cohesion might be further developed by schools, was welcomed and valued by the pupils who attended. Pupils are confident in asking questions about religious beliefs and behaviour and say that their views are valued.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good. All pupils are encouraged to participate in lessons. Pupils requiring additional support are helped so that can progress well in their learning. Careful tracking of pupils' progress successfully identifies underachievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing more opportunities for pupils to visit different places of worship and encounter speakers from a wide range of religious and cultural backgrounds.

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