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Dear Mr Naisbitt

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: Religious Education (RE) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 9 and 10 July 2008 to look at work in RE and that of David Anstead HMI to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE, the visit had a particular focus on the use of creative thinking in RE. In the case of ICT the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment.

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 (RE)

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory with good features and a good capacity for improvement.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by students in RE are broadly average and their achievement is satisfactory.

- The results in the full GCSE course are broadly in line with those attained nationally. This reflects satisfactory progress. Results in AS and A-level examinations are average and students make satisfactory progress.
- Students' attainment at Key Stage 3 is in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Students use a sound range of religious vocabulary to explain the impact of beliefs on individuals and communities. The higher attaining students can explain the reasons for diversity between and within religions. Overall, students' ability to express insights into their own and others' views are less well developed.
- RE makes a good contribution to students' wider personal development. Many students expressed the view that the subject is making a valuable contribution to their understanding of cultural diversity in the local and wider community.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge which is used well to stimulate students' thinking skills. In the sixth form, teachers' expertise enhances students' independent learning skills.
- Lessons are well-structured and tasks are mostly interesting, although the higher attaining students are not always challenged suitably. In some books there is evidence of an over-reliance on work sheets which have low level activities. There is limited evidence of open-ended creative writing in response to the material or issues considered in class.
- Good relationships in lessons help to promote learning and where teaching is securely matched to students' needs, they make good progress. In one of the lessons observed, students were able reflect seriously about suffering caused by disease and poverty, and responded sensitively to questions raised through the teaching and discussion.
- Students' work is marked regularly and conscientiously, increasingly identifying targets for improvement. The quality of these targets is variable and insufficiently linked to attainment criteria.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is satisfactory.

- Students value the provision for GCSE and examination courses in the sixth form. They think the subject develops them as rounded individuals, as well as making a contribution to their academic progress.
- There are some lively units in Years 10 and 11 for RE within the citizenship course which enable students to consider the impact of religion in the modern world. Visits to a range of places of worship enhance students' understanding of religious beliefs and practices.
- At Key Stage 3, schemes of work reflect the requirements of the Nottinghamshire agreed syllabus which was last published in 2003. The department is keen to improve curricular provision at Key Stage 3 so that it becomes more relevant and reflects national developments. Initial work has started to consider planning across the humanities subjects, using a more cross-curricular and creative skills-based approach to learning.
- Although there are opportunities for students to carry out self and peer assessment, these are not widely used enough to impact effectively on their learning.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory with good elements.

- Self-evaluation accurately identifies the subject's strengths and areas for improvement. Since the last inspection of the subject in 2004, boys' attainment has increased because of teachers' interventions. Ambitious targets are set for GCSE A*-C grades for 2008 and if met, would see attainment in the subject rise to above the national average.
- There is regular monitoring of teaching and learning and dissemination of effective practice. There is a good sense of teamwork in the department and a willingness to secure further improvement.
- Leadership ensures that students also remain committed to the subject and that its popularity as an option in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form is sustained.

Subject issue: Creative thinking in RE

The department has begun to focus attention on the place of creativity in RE. It has identified planning in Year 7 as a priority. This is well-judged as there is a secure basis to work from as a model for organising teaching and learning in the subject. Students are given opportunities to express their personal responses in creative ways, for example using the arts. The use of challenging questions and strategies to enable students to think about how and what they are learning is increasingly evident.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that revisions to the RE scheme of work incorporates good assessment strategies to help increase students' achievement further.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in ICT is good and standards are above average.

- The school uses a combination of transfer information provided by primary schools and the outcomes of its own testing at the start of Year 7 to establish students' knowledge and skills in ICT when they join the school. Attainment on entry is broadly average.
- Students make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 so that by the time they have reached the end of Year 9 standards are just above average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 in the short GCSE course, the full GCSE course and the vocational course are all above average. This means that progress from when students enter the school to when they leave is good.
- Standards in using ICT for presenting and communicating information, controlling events and handling data are above average. Students are able to use Boolean operators in refining their searches of databases and to use formulae in spreadsheets but have limited programming skills.
- A growing number of sixth formers are choosing to study ICT at A level. They make satisfactory progress and attain average standards.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning using ICT are very good. Students are aware of the need to keep themselves safe when online and say they know how to do so. They attribute this more to guidance from their parents rather than from the school although this is well addressed in lessons and assemblies.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge apart from in higher level programming. Teaching and learning are characterised by extremely good planning. Together with good classroom management skills, learning proceeds at a fast pace ensuring progress is good.
- Teachers are technically astute and use interactive whiteboards (IWBs) well to make teaching engaging. Very good use was made of the facility to take control of students' screens remotely to demonstrate a

particular skill to them. Wireless voting systems are used very effectively to check students' understanding and to challenge them to think hard and work quickly in competing against each other.

- The virtual learning environment (VLE) is particularly well used by the ICT and mathematics teams and increasingly by other subjects to make learning resources available to students online in their classrooms and from home. Monitoring shows that making learning resources more accessible is improving the quality of homework tasks, encouraging higher attainers to go further and better engaging lower attaining students.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- All students receive the statutory National Curriculum for ICT. At Key Stage 4 all students study a short GCSE course or can opt to pursue the full GCSE or a vocational qualification. The choice of qualifications is appropriate for the full range of abilities. In the sixth form an increasing number of students are choosing A level ICT.
- There is good coverage of using ICT for communicating and presenting ideas and for modelling and manipulating data. The school recognises that opportunities for higher attaining students to develop their ability to program are limited because the ICT team do not have the expertise to deliver this.
- Good leadership has created a demand from staff and students to be able to use ICT to improve learning in other subjects. Most classrooms are equipped with an IWB or data projector and all teachers have their own laptops. ICT is being used well to improve teaching in a range of subjects. The impact of ICT in improving learning is less evident because it is limited by access to resources. The school is taking action to remove this constraint. More laptops have recently been purchased and two new computer suites and an additional learning resource centre are currently under construction.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management in ICT are good.

- The school follows national guidance in evaluating the quality of its provision as well as issuing questionnaires to students about what they would like to see improved. Consequently the school has a detailed and accurate view of its strengths and areas for improvement which inform strategic planning.
- A detailed audit of staff training needs informs the provision of a comprehensive and varied programme of professional development. Strengths in the school's specialism are used to coach and support

other subject teams in making better use of ICT. The impact is seen in the better use of IWBs by teachers in presenting learning and by the development of online learning resources available to students from the VLE.

- Extremely efficient management of the budget has enabled the school to spend significantly more on ICT than is the average for similar schools. This is enabling the school to respond well to the rising demand for ICT resources. Students appreciate not having to share computers. Good technical support ensures the network is reliable although access to the VLE is sometimes slow because the server is old and struggles to keep up with demand. A more powerful server has been purchased to upgrade the responsiveness and capabilities of the VLE.

- Good leadership and management have ensured staff and students see ICT as central to their learning. The quality of ICT provision is improving rapidly, standards are rising and the proportion of students choosing to pursue an ICT qualification is increasing.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is satisfactory. Students' work in ICT is rigorously tested and the outcomes collated in a very good tracking system which enables the school to see who is meeting or exceeding expectations and who is falling behind. Individual progress in ICT is reported to parents each term. All students spoken to were able to explain what their current National Curriculum level of performance was in ICT. However, few were able say what they needed to do to improve their work. ICT is widely used in other subjects but its use is not formally assessed. This means the ICT team are largely unaware of how well students are able to apply the skills they have taught them when working elsewhere.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring students have guidance on how they might improve their work
- assessing how well students use ICT in their other subjects to evaluate how well they are able to apply the skills they have been taught in ICT elsewhere
- providing more opportunities for students to develop their programming skills.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT 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

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools