

22 September 2008

Mr P Burluraux  
Headteacher  
Grange Technology College  
Haycliffe Lane  
Bradford  
BD5 9ET

Dear Mr Burluraux

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE).

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16-17 September 2008 to look at work in RE.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had particular foci on creative thinking in RE.

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, discussions with students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, attendance at a faith-based Muslim assembly and observation of eight RE lessons.

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

#### Achievement and standards

The achievement of students in RE is satisfactory overall.

- Full course GCSE results in RE in 2008, while below the national average, represented good achievement by students with 51% gaining an A\*-C grade. Given the high entry rate for the subject, this was a notable result. The percentage gaining the higher A\*-B grades was particularly positive. Girls did significantly better than boys. A small cohort of students was entered for the short course GCSE and gained grades broadly in line with the overall performance in other subjects. A small cohort of students was entered for AS level in 2008 where achievement was more modest. This was in part the result of limited preparation during the GCSE course for the more challenging and independent learning required by advanced level work.

- The achievement of students in lessons is broadly satisfactory. At Key Stage 3 students acquire a basic knowledge of the major world faiths and some are able to discuss key beliefs with some confidence. Their ability to deploy higher order skills of enquiry and evaluation when studying religion and beliefs is more limited. There is some imbalance in achievement across the two areas of attainment with students more successful in 'learning about' rather than 'learning from' religion because they have too few opportunities to reflect on, evaluate and express their own ideas.
- At Key Stage 4, while students are prepared well to meet the requirements of the examination, this is not always reflected in the quality of their wider progress in the subject. Again, their ability to use higher order skills when exploring religion and beliefs is at best satisfactory. In the sixth form, students' progress is sometimes hampered where the pitch of the work is not matched closely to their needs. There is a strong focus on teaching about the Muslim faith in the examination provision at both Key Stage 4 and post-16 reflecting the faith of the majority of the students; in some cases Muslim students report that their learning about the faith does not extend them sufficiently.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is satisfactory. Behaviour in lessons and attitudes to learning are consistently good. The subject makes a positive contribution to students' awareness of, and respect for, diversity. Some recent initiatives have supported the drive to broaden their cultural and religious awareness through, for example, the visit of some Muslim comedians. Where RE is less successful at present is in developing students' confidence in talking about the subject and in promoting their skills as independent thinkers. Too many students are content to express standard answers and not rise to the challenge of critical investigation.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- The quality of teaching in RE is variable reflecting the need to secure greater consistency in planning and in the management of learning. However, all lessons are orderly and relationships are positive. High standards are set regarding attitudes and behaviour and students respond appropriately. Very tightly directed routines are often used to structure most lessons although, on occasions, these can narrow and limit students' learning.
- In the best lessons, lively activities are used to promote good learning and encourage students to ask questions, share ideas openly, and think for themselves.
- While some of those teaching RE are technically non-specialists, subject knowledge is usually at least satisfactory and often good. The head of subject is aware of the need to work with colleagues to secure an approach to teaching about Islam which is appropriately open, investigative, and balanced.
- While most lessons are at least satisfactory, there are sometimes weaknesses in the management of the students' learning. Learning outcomes are not always made clear enough to students; activities are sometimes not selected or sequenced to ensure objectives are met; work is not always differentiated or pitched appropriately to match students' needs; and, on occasions, learning is driven by the need to complete tasks rather than meet objectives.

There is scope to extend the use of questioning and oral work to develop and check students' understanding. There is sometimes limited opportunity for students to develop independence, group working skills, and confidence in speaking. The use of ICT to structure lessons is sometimes a barrier to success where it leads to formulaic teaching and over-directed learning.

- Students' work is usually marked routinely. Assessment arrangements are being developed. Some use is being made of peer assessment in lessons. While levelled assessments have been identified for Key Stage 3, at present, these do not have a clear enough set of criteria in place to ensure consistency and reliability of marking. As a result students do not always have a clear idea about their progress or how to improve.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision for RE meets the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus although recent changes to the overall Year 7 curriculum will require a review of the overall Key Stage 3 RE programme. The pattern of provision at Key Stage 3 has changed this year with the introduction of an integrated learning programme in Year 7 to reflect the revised secondary curriculum. The new programme is still under development but current planning does not include any significant RE component. Curriculum provision is years 8 and 9 is satisfactory, although it will require review from September 2009 in order to ensure that an appropriate pattern of continuity and progression in learning is built in and the full requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are met. The department is uncertain how far the syllabus can be used flexibly to respond to the impact of the integrated learning programme.
- Good provision is made for GCSE. While the allocation of one hour a week is modest, ability setting at Key Stage 4 has supported the use of two pathways in RE, full and short course, to help match the provision to the students' differing needs. AS and A2 provision is in place although numbers are modest. There is appropriate provision of core RE for students in the sixth form.
- Great care has been taken to balance the curriculum to reflect the Muslim faith background of the majority of students while respecting the need to include all students in the learning. While this is broadly successful, the department has recognised the need to review the place of teaching about Christianity in the overall provision to ensure there is more continuity between learning at Key Stage 3 and the GCSE programme.
- The head of subject has made good progress in developing an overall scheme of work for Key Stage 3. This has provided a basic structure for planning and assessment in RE. Students now receive a useful summary of each unit of work with identified homework tasks. This has secured greater consistency in the teaching and more structure in students' learning. However, the current planning tends to encourage a rather task-driven and slightly fragmented approach to the subject. The department has rightly identified the need to develop planning further by introducing more differentiation, clarifying how each unit builds on prior learning and using level descriptors to identify the pitch and overall purpose of the units. Lesson planning has also benefited from the introduction of a standardised proforma although, again, this is not always used effectively and requires further development.

- Very good progress has been made recently in developing RE activities to enrich and extend students' personal development and learning with a clear focus on extending their range of cultural experience. These include visits to a variety of local places of worship, attendance at external lectures, use of visitors from faith communities, sessions led by Muslim comedians and introduction of lessons using 'Philosophy for Children' strategies. Progress is also being made in developing links with religious groups in the local community as an aspect of the schools' overall commitment to promoting community cohesion.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The relatively newly appointed head of RE is providing the department with very good leadership following a period of uncertainty. She is highly committed, energetic and thoughtful and is well-supported by the senior leadership team and line manager. Crucially, she has used a series of monitoring strategies to identify the key priorities for development and produced a useful self-evaluation of the subject.
- A strategic approach to improvement has been adopted focussed initially on developing the skills of the teaching team and securing a stable basis for the delivery of the subject. A clear improvement plan has been introduced. These actions have raised the status of the subject successfully and provided a clear platform for future development.
- A coherent approach towards monitoring has been introduced using a range of strategies to evaluate planning and delivery and to start to moderate assessments. Staff training needs have been identified and are being addressed. The subject leader has made links with local subject groups in the authority to provide a further level of support. The active involvement of the subject leader in the Year 7 integrated learning programme is providing a good context for the planning of future work in RE.
- RE is well resourced with texts and media resources although care needs to be taken to ensure the use of ICT in lessons does not narrow the pattern of teaching and learning. The subject benefits from a suiting of teaching rooms although this exposes the very significant variation in the quality of display in different rooms. In some cases display is good but elsewhere it is inadequate and does not celebrate achievement or diversity.

## Creative thinking in RE

The head of RE appreciates the importance of the subject as a context for developing creative thinking to make a stronger contribution to personal development and learning, particularly given the very significant role that religion plays in the lives of many of the students. At present, however, much of the students' thinking in RE lacks intellectual challenge and this is a key factor limiting achievement. There are clear exceptions to this in some lessons and some parts of the curriculum where students are challenged to engage creatively with the interpretation and investigation of ideas. A barrier to the use of creativity at present is the tendency to try to cover too much content without extending deeper study. The agreed syllabus requirement to cover all six major traditions at Key Stage 3 poses a challenge particularly in the context of the development of the innovative

Year 7 Integrated Learning programme. The impact of this Year 7 programme has yet to be evaluated. At present there is no clear RE dimension to the work and this is a missed opportunity which will be reviewed as the initiative develops. The department has plans to review the rest of the Key Stage 3 RE programme to build on the overall approaches to learning being promoted through the new Year 7 provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- securing greater consistency and higher quality in planning and teaching across the department
- providing more opportunities for students to use higher order skills, exercise independence and take responsibility for their learning
- developing more opportunities to use structured oral work and discussion in lessons to enable students to use talk more effectively to promote their learning
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum for RE both in the light of the Year 7 Integrated Learning programme and the need to provide greater challenge, continuity and progression in students' learning
- ensuring the quality of display in all subject rooms is of a consistent high quality.

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

As explained in our previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE. The letter will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine  
Her Majesty's Inspector