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Sir Pritpal Singh  
Headteacher  
Drayton Manor High School  
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Dear Sir Pritpal Singh

### Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 - 20 November 2008 to look at work in religious education (RE). On a personal note I would like to thank you all for your assistance in making areas of the school so accessible.

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.

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in RE is good and standards are above average.

- The standards reached by the students at the end of Key Stage 3 meet and often exceed the expectations of the agreed syllabus, while those at the end of Key Stage 4 are generally above national expectations. AS and A level students generally reach their target grades.
- Students arrive at the school with above average levels of attainment overall. In response to challenging targets, the majority make good or very good progress in RE at all key stages.
- GCSE results have been improving steadily. Both full course and short course entrants achieve results that are above national averages. In

both courses students achieve well, although girls' performance exceeds that of boys. The majority of students meet or exceed challenging targets.

- Students in Key Stage 3 are knowledgeable about the religions they study and they make good use of technical vocabulary when talking and writing about them. They understand that religions have an impact on people's lives and are able to relate the teachings of religions to specific ethical issues. They offer interpretations for the symbolism of religious art. There are some aspects of RE in which students' progress is weaker; for example in identifying cultural, theological and historical reasons for the differences within and between religions.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is good overall and the subject makes a very positive contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The subject offers good opportunities for students to consider the meaning for their own lives of ideas drawn from religious contexts. For example, Year 7 students considered the responsibilities of founders in different situations.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- The subject is taught by three specialist teachers and a few non-specialists. They have very different approaches and teaching styles, most of which prove very effective, and they are open to new developments and innovation. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they use an imaginative range of approaches to teaching and learning which engage and motivate students. In particular, where the school focus on 'learning to learn' guides activities it is having a positive impact on students' learning in RE.
- Lessons are carefully planned and well managed. They focus on getting students thinking and this is achieved through lively and purposeful discussion and challenging activities. In a good Year 12 lesson students were challenged to resolve situations applying utilitarian principles.
- Most lessons are accessible to all students and additional help is given unobtrusively to those who need it. Teaching assistants are particularly effective. Independent learning is encouraged; students work well together and learn from each other. Teachers support students in their learning, offering new lines of enquiry and correcting misconceptions. In a minority of lessons there is a tendency for the teacher to talk for too long and sometimes starter activities take up too much time.
- Students generally respond well to RE lessons and describe it as an interesting and challenging subject. They value the opportunities it provides for learning about the religions in the vibrant and diverse area in which they live, although they would benefit from more opportunity to engage directly with the surrounding religious communities.

- Assessment is good overall. At Key Stage 3 students know their target level and how to reach it. Peer and self-assessment are established although not practiced consistently throughout the department or across all year groups. Some very good practice was seen where Year 10 students were encouraged to respond to the teacher's written comments on their work.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The provision of GCSE short course for all students is a strength of the subject. The focus on social and ethical issues makes a very positive contribution to students' learning and wider personal development. The smaller number of students who take the full course speak enthusiastically about this provision, although it is a pity that their needs cannot be met within the normal school timetable.
- Planning for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is good. There is careful attention to setting learning objectives and tasks that help students understand and meet examination requirements. Medium and short term planning includes differentiated learning objectives and written tasks are carefully planned to include stepped activities to help weaker students to write extended answers. These factors contribute to the examination successes in the department.
- The new Key Stage 3 curriculum, designed to implement the new Ealing Agreed Syllabus, is a work in progress. So far the planning for the three year groups is not sufficiently coherent. Continuity and progression are not yet fully developed throughout the key stage and there are few apparent links between the distinct units of the curriculum. There is insufficient consistency in the quality of Key Stage 3 planning because not all staff involved are working to the head of department's planning specification.

## Leadership and Management

Leadership and management in RE are good overall.

- Religious education in the school is led and managed by an experienced head of department who has been effective in raising the status and popularity of the subject and improving examination results in recent years. The department benefits from three specialist RE teachers. Their abilities and teaching styles vary considerably and the head of department encourages the sharing of good practice.
- In response to regular monitoring and an exhaustive questionnaire from senior managers, the head of department has completed a detailed and accurate departmental evaluation which, along with a thorough development plan, identifies realistic and fitting priorities for further improvement.

- The department responds well to very challenging targets and intervenes to redress under-achievement, particularly among those students preparing for examinations.
- A wide range of resources is used to support the learning of all students. Planning and resources are beginning to enable students to make connections between their work in RE and in other subjects, such as history and art.
- The head of department has led by example in the development of new teaching styles, particularly those designed to develop students' learning skills.

### Creative thinking in RE

Through regular discussion in most lessons, students have ample opportunities to be creative with ideas; for example, they consider the causes of suffering and the possible conflict between the fact of suffering and belief in God. The more imaginative lessons provide opportunities for speculating, hypothesising, and interpreting stories and images. The best teachers require students to use enquiry skills, carry out investigations and offer interpretations. The curriculum, particularly in Year 7, is being reviewed to build in links with other subjects. There are close links with citizenship, history and art. Students went on a local trail with both RE and history objectives to meet and the subject contributed to a world food day. The department is taking seriously the strand in the agreed syllabus that requires students to interpret expressions of religion through a unit on religious art.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising boys' attainment
- assessing student's progress at Key Stage 3 against all strands in the agreed syllabus
- securing greater consistency, continuity and progression in planning the Key Stage 3 curriculum

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop religious education 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

Barbara Wintersgill  
Additional Inspector