

19 March 2009

Ms A Jerrard
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Jerrard

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE).

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16-17 March 2009 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 focus 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, and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good with good capacity for further improvement.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of students in RE is good.

- A very small number of students sat the full course GCSE examination in 2008. All students attained A* to C grades. The short course GCSE results in 2008 improved from the previous year. The proportion of students who attained A* to C grades was above those attained nationally by girls. The results represent good achievement for these students. There are good intervention strategies in place to improve on the 2008 GCSE results and the department is confident in reaching the target set in 2009. Students can explain the role and impact of religion in contemporary society confidently and with growing discernment; for example, when considering the issue of euthanasia and the presentation of religion in the media.

- Achievement at Key Stage 3 is good overall. Students attain standards that are broadly in line with the Merton agreed syllabus. Most students acquire a broad understanding of the key features of different religions. They have a reasonable grasp of distinctive beliefs within Christianity and are able to compare and contrast practices between the religions they have studied. Students' ability to explore and respond to religious and moral issues is particularly strong and helps to secure a good foundation for their studies at GCSE level at Key Stage 4.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is very good. Their attitudes to RE are positive and they behave well in lessons. The subject makes an important contribution to the school's multicultural community and in developing students' appreciation of religious and cultural diversity found locally and in the wider communities.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge which they use skilfully to probe students' knowledge, thereby deepening their understanding of religion. The most successful teaching in RE is when students are active participants in their learning. This is facilitated by imaginative tasks and activities, for example through the use of information and communication technology, art and music. This enables students to make thoughtful responses, reflecting their understanding of the spiritual and moral dimensions of life. Students also learn well through pair and small group discussions, consolidated further with independent tasks. Students are encouraged to record their findings in a variety of ways and share their learning which also helps to build positive relationships in lessons. Homework tasks usually extend students' learning beyond that achieved in lessons.
- Lessons are well-organised to ensure that learning starts promptly and students usually have a clear view about learning objectives and outcomes. End of lesson plenaries check what has been learned.
- Assessment procedures are fit for purpose and good overall. There is an established tracking system which records results from regular assessments. Ongoing assessment informs teachers' planning. Their feedback through marking and verbal discussion gives clear guidance to students for improvement. Students have opportunities to assess their own work and contributions to class discussions but the use of peer-assessment is underdeveloped.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum for RE is well planned and all students have good opportunities to accredit their learning through the short course GCSE. A small, but growing, number of students study for the full GCSE course.
- Schemes of work are in the process of being adjusted to take full account of the revised Merton agreed syllabus. The Year 7 curriculum is particularly effective in developing students' critical thinking and learning skills. Progression into Year 10 is secure because of the good balance between

teaching about religious beliefs and practices and developing students' ability to make their own informed responses to what they study.

- Students have opportunities to visit places of worship but have less engagement with visiting speakers from a wide range of religious communities.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- RE benefits from a well-run department. The subject leader is enthusiastic and keen to innovate in order to keep students interested and challenged. A strong direction is given to improving students' achievement.
- Strengths and weaknesses in the subject are accurately identified through careful evaluation, reflecting the impact of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Analysis of GCSE results has led to syllabus changes to better reflect the representation and interests of students' heritages.
- The teaching team have a good professional approach towards their work and newly qualified teachers in the department are supported well.
- The subject leader keeps abreast of current initiatives in the subject and the secondary curriculum which also helps to maintain a positive profile of RE in the school.

Creative thinking in RE

The use of creative thinking in RE is good overall because of the attention paid to planning for students' personal, learning and thinking skills. Students are given opportunities to investigate religion and belief and good use is made of creative activities to stimulate interest and enjoyment. Teachers' use of experiential approaches enlivens learning for students. Consequently, students routinely express their personal feelings about the beliefs and practices they study in a range of ways, including through the performing arts and debates.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending opportunities for students to have first hand experience of members of religious communities through, for example, contact with visiting speakers
- involving students more in learning through the use of peer-assessments.

I 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

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector