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Mr D Crawshaw  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Crawshaw

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 June 2009 to look at work in religious education (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 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 finding included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of a lesson.

It was agreed that insufficient evidence was available to come to judgements about standards and provision for RE because of the serious staffing difficulties which have recently disrupted the pattern of work in the subject.

There are a number of important strengths in the school's provision for RE. These include:

- The good leadership and management of RE reflected in the efforts being made to resolve the current staffing issues facing the subject. The subject leader brings commitment, energy and expertise to her role. She has kept up-to-date with recent developments in the subject. There are secure arrangements in place to monitor and review the subject linked to a sound process of improvement planning. RE benefits from support from the Governors.

- There are good arrangements in place to accredit pupils' achievements in RE. Year 11 results in 2008 at entry level demonstrate pupils achieving in line with their targets and represent good progress. There are good arrangements in place to track pupil progress in RE using a range of different measures. A particular strength is the way the school has devised systems to monitor aspects of pupils' personal development in RE alongside their more formal academic progress. It is to the credit of the school that some of their assessment materials have been used for exemplification by the AQA examination board.
- Some of the teaching, particularly at Key Stage 4, is of good quality with significant efforts made to forge links between RE material and the pupils' own experience and questions. This has helped pupils understand the relevance of their work in the subject. Where pupils are engaged by the teaching they show a genuine interest in the subject.
- The subject leader has been keen to explore different models of curriculum provision for RE in order to secure ways of meeting the distinctive needs of the boys at the school. The introduction of RE theme days exemplifies this innovative approach.

A number of factors limit the effectiveness of RE including:

- Staffing problems in the current year including a long term absence of the main subject teacher have had a serious impact on pupils' progress. Their learning has been disrupted and it has not been possible to deliver much of the planned scheme of work.
- While care has been taken to match the provision to the requirements of the Warrington agreed syllabus, the current Key Stage 2 and 3 schemes of work over-emphasises the collection of data about religion at the expense of helping the pupils develop their broader subject understanding and skills. As a result pupils do not always see the relevance of their learning. Too much of the written work at Key Stage 3 involves pupils in low level copying out of information and does not encourage pupils to express themselves independently.
- The current model of curriculum provision at Key Stages 2 and 3 tends to fragment the pupils' learning and limits opportunities to forge links with personal learning and thinking skills and literacy.

Areas for consideration, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the pattern of curriculum provision at Key Stages 2 and 3 to explore the flexibility to provide more opportunities for pupils to develop more sustained lines of enquiry into the subject
- focusing learning on key concepts and questions of the subject rather than delivery of content about religion, in line with the locally agreed syllabus
- developing more first hand opportunities for pupils to visit, and meet with representatives from, a diversity of local religious communities

- securing greater consistency in the quality of teaching by providing appropriate training opportunities, particularly by developing a wider range of teaching and learning strategies.

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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine  
Her Majesty's Inspector