

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



23 February 2010

Mr R Newton-Chance  
Principal  
Queen Elizabeth's Community College  
Western Road  
Crediton  
Devon  
EX17 3LU

Dear Mr Newton-Chance

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 February 2010 to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how well students are becoming effective learners 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- At Key Stage 4, students taking GCSE Religious Studies reach standards that compare well with those in other schools and with their other subjects. Most of these students make good progress. Those taking GCSE Humanities reach standards comparable to those in other schools and most make satisfactory progress. The small number of students taking GCE Religious Studies at A level reach, and often exceed, their targets. They make good progress.

- In general, Key Stage 4 students make at least satisfactory progress in communicating their ideas, findings and responses. They demonstrate the ability to reflect on and discuss a wide range of religious and human questions and issues, and to identify the impact of religion on people's lives. Their ability to recognise the diversity within religions and to evaluate religious and moral issues is less well developed.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory with areas requiring improvement. Students have a satisfactory knowledge of the issues studied but rarely identify similarities and differences between and within religions or explain why these differences exist. Students give some interpretations of symbols but rarely of other forms of religious expression.
- Key Stage 3 students can take responsibility for planning, developing and reviewing an enquiry during 'creating solutions' days but these abilities were less evident in routine lessons and their RE work. In one lesson observed, they showed some ability to organise their learning through role-play, although some did not take the task seriously enough.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is satisfactory. Behaviour is satisfactory and most students show interest in the subject, although some do not participate well in lessons. RE makes a sound contribution to most aspects of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It makes a particularly good contribution to their cultural development through links with Muslim students in Bristol and Tanzania.

#### Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- The best RE teaching implements whole-school initiatives focused on raising standards; notably, skills for success. These lessons are well-organised and managed. Students behave well and respond positively to the teaching demonstrating an interest in their learning. Tasks enable students to make satisfactory progress and they are assessed regularly.
- Weaker lessons are not planned well and the pace is slow. Unimaginative tasks continue for too long after the learning objectives have been achieved. Teachers do not intervene to insist on good behaviour and application. Teachers did not plan time for the evaluation of learning.
- Students are assessed at the end of each unit of work. Level-related assessment objectives are provided and students use these to evaluate their work. Teachers provide comments and set targets for improvement. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the quality of assessment is at least satisfactory. At Key Stage 3, a number of factors prevent the procedures from being fully effective. Teachers' comments did not always remind students of the focus of the task and, sometimes, included unhelpful advice. The quality of assessment in students' 'skills for success' folders is more tightly focused but these principles have not been applied more generally to RE work.

## Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum makes good provision for all students to develop an understanding of religion in the wider contexts of world affairs and cultures. RE is offered as an optional subject. The course is planned well and includes interesting resources about religious issues in today's world.
- At Key Stage 3, 'creating solutions' days require students to draw together their learning in all subjects to work on problem-solving activities. Students have opportunities to work purposefully in groups, demonstrate leadership skills, present ideas and reflect on their learning.
- However, the RE curriculum for Key Stage 3 needs improvement. The Year 7 curriculum has developed in a way that should enable students to understand how subjects link together. The impact of this initiative on RE has been reduced by the use of programmes of study and assessment criteria from the previous agreed syllabus. The result is a missed opportunity to introduce an exciting and innovative curriculum, particularly in Year 7. The links between RE topics' overarching themes are sometimes unimaginative.
- A strength of the curriculum is the provision of good enrichment opportunities. As a Humanities Specialist College, the primary aim is to encourage active global citizenship and the school's link with a Tanzanian school gives students first-hand evidence about Tanzanian life. The faculty has introduced a link with a Bristol school with a large Muslim population and visits to the school for Year 9.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- RE is led and managed by the humanities coordinators for Key Stages 3 and 4. They have worked hard to implement the school's ambitious priorities for change and this can be seen in the systems in place for planning, self-evaluation, assessment and monitoring. In particular, the internal review, produced in 2009, is a rigorous and perceptive document.
- Leadership and management at Key Stage 4 are good. Monitoring, review, training priorities and spending are dependent on rigorous analysis of examination results.
- Leadership and management at Key Stage 3 suffer from insecure RE subject knowledge which has allowed the areas needing improvement to pass unnoticed. Some good systems are in place to support students' learning, but humanities leaders do not have sufficiently detailed subject knowledge in RE.
- Humanities have introduced several important changes over a short period of time. The high levels of creative thinking at senior level have not had

the desired impact consistently where teachers have not had the skills or time to apply new initiatives in the classroom.

Subject issue: how well students are becoming effective learners in RE

- At Key Stage 4, students are involved in a clear process of enquiry using a range of challenging skills. They regularly reflect on their learning. Skills are developed in a progressive way, particularly skills of using a range of sources. However, there are few opportunities for students to reflect on their own lives in the light of their learning about religion and belief.
- At Key Stage 3, the extent to which students become effective learners varies with the quality of teaching. Where the priority on skills development is implemented, students develop a range of competencies in an appropriate and steady way. There are regular opportunities for students to reflect on their learning, although they do not always receive accurate guidance on making the best of these opportunities.
- Overall, RE makes some modest contribution to the ability of students to reflect on their own lives in the light of their learning about religion and belief and to the development of their wider personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS).

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- implementing the 2007 Devon agreed syllabus at Key Stage 3
- raising standards at Key Stage 3 by increasing the level of challenge and by setting tasks related to RE-specific objectives from the agreed syllabus
- ensuring that all teachers are aware of and act upon school priorities for developing students' skills for becoming independent learners
- improving the RE subject expertise at Key Stage 3.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and SACRE and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill  
Additional Inspector