

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



15 March 2010

Mr S Jowett
Headteacher
The Chantry High School
Martley
Worcester
Worcestershire
WR6 6QA

Dear Mr Jowett

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 4 and 5 March 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Results in the full GCSE course are well above average. The proportion of students reaching the highest A* or A grades is particularly impressive. In lessons, students are using the skills of enquiry effectively. Many students use a good range of evidence and examples to justify their own ideas while providing a detailed evaluation of the perspective of others.
- The strength of students' achievement in RE lies in the ability of the older students to use higher order thinking skills. Many are handling complex

concepts confidently. As a result, students develop the confidence to express themselves effectively both orally and in writing.

- Achievement at Key Stage 3 is good. Students attain standards that are slightly above the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The department is working hard to establish patterns of learning in RE at Key Stage 3 that are challenging and promote higher attainment. However, the progress that students make across various elements of the subject is uneven. Crucially, they are not integrating the two key areas of attainment, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion, effectively.
- RE makes an impressive contribution to students' wider personal development. Students enjoy the subject and respond with enthusiasm to the opportunities it provides to participate in some challenging and engaging activities. Behaviour and attitudes to learning in RE lessons are exemplary. Students show curiosity and insight, and reflect seriously on life's fundamental questions. They show an excellent understanding of, and respect for, their own and other people's culture. In addition, many students expressed the view that the subject is making a distinctive and important contribution to their understanding of diversity in the society around them.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Lessons are typified by excellent relationships, mutual respect, humour and warmth. At its best, teaching is imaginative and lively. It provides good opportunities for students to express feelings and ideas. Lessons proceed at pace and effective use is made of a range of engaging and interesting resources. Good use is made of discussion, exposition, reflection and questioning.
- At Key Stage 4, great care is taken to help students understand and prepare for the requirements of the examination. Good support is provided for those who are underachieving. There is occasionally a tendency to focus slightly too much on the techniques required to pass the examination rather than on developing students' understanding of the material. However, overall, the effective teaching secures the good progress made by the students.
- At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching and learning, although good, is more variable. Some of the tasks set are not challenging enough. While the planning usually indicates how the learning should be adjusted to accommodate the varying ability levels in the mixed-ability classes, in practice insufficient use is made of differentiated activities in some lessons.
- Students' progress is assessed regularly. Emphasis is placed on using a range of assessment strategies to ensure that all students can make progress and to reflect their preferred learning style. Tasks set are generally purposeful and varied. However, some tasks are not defined well enough to be a basis for reliable judgements against levels.

- Marking is completed regularly and is particularly effective at Key Stage 4 where students are given a very clear understanding of the progress they are making and how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject has a secure place within the curriculum. The RE programme includes a strong focus on the Christian tradition, particularly in Key Stage 4 examination courses. While this is successful, the department has recognised the need to review the place of teaching about other faiths in the overall provision to ensure that students fully appreciate the nature of religious diversity in modern Britain.
- A priority for the department is the establishment of a more secure curriculum in Years 7 and 8. The school is aware that its quality is variable and more needs to be done to ensure that challenge, progression and continuity are built into students' learning. Limited use is made of levels in planning learning outcomes. Individual units do not always ensure that there is a clear process of enquiry running through the work or provide for the structured development of skills. Links between units are not always clear, particularly those focusing on non-Christian religions, and this leads to lower levels of achievement in these units.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The school has a strong commitment to the subject. RE is led and mainly taught by one knowledgeable and enthusiastic teacher. She makes every effort to engage students with the subject by making it relevant and enjoyable, for example through the imaginative use of information and communication technology.
- The department has a clear structure of monitoring, self-review, and development planning. However, the analysis of performance data has not been sharp enough.
- The department has good access to the school's generic professional development provision although opportunities to attend external RE training are very limited.

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

Throughout work in RE, students are able to take some responsibility for their own learning. Opportunities to develop creative and critical thinking are good, particularly in the context of 'learning from' religion where students are often encouraged to think for themselves and come to personal judgements. The department is aware that there is a need for development of stronger cross-curricular links, particularly with personal learning and thinking skills

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the Key Stage 3 scheme of work to ensure it embeds greater continuity and progression into students' learning
- developing the use made of levels of attainment to inform medium- and short-term planning to ensure learning is matched closely to students' needs
- developing further opportunities for older students to discuss issues about religion in the modern world and their own ideas about important religious questions alongside their investigation of two major religions.

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

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector