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Mr P Rowland
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Dear Mr Rowland

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 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; observation of six lessons; a learning walk; and discussions with representatives from the Diocese of Gloucester.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Results in the full course GCSE in 2009 were above the national average and reflected good achievement with many students exceeding their targets. This pattern of high attainment has been sustained over the last few years. All students not taking the full course are entered into the short course, where attainment is also above average and achievement is good.
- Students make good progress in Key Stage 4. They have a good understanding of philosophical and ethical issues and demonstrate a

strong understanding of the part that religion plays in the personal and social lives of individuals and religious communities.

- The progress made by students across Key Stage 3 is variable but good overall. Current attainment, although broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus, is beginning to rise. Students have the opportunity to study a range of religions, making links between different aspects of religion and reflecting on how these relate to their own experiences.
- The subject makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Attitudes to the subject are very positive and many students show a real sense of pride in pursuing areas of interest, as seen in the creative ways in which they approach their homework. Students are very keen to explain the importance of RE in developing a respectful and harmonious society. They consider the knowledge they learn in RE to be important in helping them to challenge negative images portrayed in the media.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Teachers have a positive relationship with students and the majority of students are keen and well motivated to learn. The strongest lessons provide a clear focus on active learning. Teachers use good questioning to assess students' current learning and lessons are structured well. They provide students with varied opportunities to engage in debate, reflect on the thoughts of others, and make links to religious beliefs. However, this good practice is not consistent in all lessons.
- Lesson plans are detailed and focused on students' learning and differing needs within each class. The purpose of the learning is shared at the beginning of each lesson to ensure that students are clear about what they are doing and how to succeed. While planning reflects students' prior knowledge, work set for the most able students does not always offer the appropriate level of challenge.
- The arrangements for assessing work at the end of each unit are very good. Not only are students involved in assessing their own work, but they also contribute to the assessment of their peers. Consequently, students understand the progress they are making and how to improve. Where marking in books is at its best, it provides students with the next steps to learning. However, this good practice is not yet consistent across year groups or classes. The school has a detailed system for monitoring students' progress and is now considering ways of refining it so that it accurately monitors the progress of students at Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good with outstanding features.

- The school has ensured that students have a number of memorable learning experiences. Many students comment on the good opportunities to engage in debates. Where possible, RE takes a cross-curricular approach and, as a result, participates in 'flexi-learning days' and 'multi-faith days'. During these days, students engage in topics of interest, such as gene therapy, providing them with opportunities to listen to a number of speakers sharing their differing views on an issue. As a result of close links with the Diocese of Gloucester, students are given opportunities to plan elements of the curriculum and support the wider community by becoming 'community champions.'
- Schemes of work are good. They provide detailed guidance to staff to ensure that learning is structured well and students have many opportunities to engage in research. Students take ownership of their learning and reflect on the opinions and experiences of others as well as their own. The school is now considering ways to ensure the levels within the agreed syllabus are more explicitly referred to within their scheme.
- Students have good opportunities to develop cultural and community links through projects such as the 'multi-faith day' and schemes that explore issues such as anti-social behaviour. However, opportunities to visit places of worship and meet representatives from different faiths are generally limited.
- The school's specialist technology status enriches the RE curriculum through providing information and communication technology support and contributing to projects such as the creation of stained glass windows for the proposed new sanctuary.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- An accurate understanding of the department's strengths and areas of development has led to well-considered plans to tackle any inconsistencies. There is a clear commitment to high standards. Consequently, the future development of the subject and the capacity to improve is very strong. The head of RE is working hard to ensure that staff absence is having a limited impact on students' outcomes.
- The subject benefits from two qualified specialists and a programme of regular departmental meetings. Rigorous monitoring activities ensure that all those teaching the subject are prepared effectively and actively involved in reviewing learning. Arrangements for professional development are very good and include support from external providers as well as in-house training.

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

RE makes a very strong contribution to the development of students as effective learners. Students are actively engaged in taking responsibility for their own learning through planning, making decisions, presenting their findings and evaluating their own work as well as that of their peers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the more able students receive work that better meets their needs
- developing opportunities for students to visit a variety of religious places of worship and meet representatives of different religions and beliefs
- ensuring that the progress that students make at Key Stage 3 is monitored accurately.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Gadd
Her Majesty's Inspector