

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



15 February 2010

Mr S Shephard
Headteacher
The Bishop David Brown School
Albert Drive
Woking
Surrey
GU21 5RF

Dear Mr Shephard

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 2 and 3 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 good.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is good.

- Students following the full course GCSE in RE make good progress so that by the time they take their examinations in Year 11 attainment in the subject is broadly average. However, the proportion of students gaining the highest A* or A grades is below the national average.
- Those students following the GCSE course are making good progress and are on track to meet the targets set for the end of Year 11. The progress made by students across Key Stage 3 is variable but good overall; by the

time they reach the end of Year 9, their attainment is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.

- In Key Stage 3, students have the opportunity to study a range of religions, making links with different aspects of religion and reflecting on how these relate to their own experiences. By the end of Key Stage 4, students undertake enquiries into religion, understand the similarities and differences between religions and can discuss and analyse a range of social, moral and religious issues.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities along with those that speak English as a second language make as much progress as their peers. This is due to the good support they receive in class and through individual programmes outside of the class.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They appreciate the way in which it contributes to their understanding of cultural diversity and RE develops their confidence as active members of the communities around them.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teachers have a positive relationship with students and ensure that behaviour is good within lessons. Effective use is made of questioning to assess students' knowledge and understanding of religious concepts. Lessons are well structured and provide students with varied opportunities to engage in debate, share opinions and reflect on the thoughts of others. Good use is made of information and communication technology and resources to support and extend students' knowledge within the subject.
- Learning objectives are shared well within lessons and key vocabulary is explored to ensure that students fully understand the concepts they are investigating. 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 good. Consequently, students understand the progress they are making and how to improve. The school is in the process of developing a monitoring system that more closely plots students' progress through the school.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is satisfactory with some good features.

- The schemes of work are good. They provide detailed guidance to staff and ensure that learning is structured well to enable students to engage in research and debate and reflect on the opinions and experiences of others as well as their own. Appropriate links are made between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. The school is now working on ensuring that thinking skills are more explicitly identified within the scheme.

- Students have good opportunities to develop cultural and community awareness through the various projects that they have been involved in, such as the international evenings and 'building community bridges' project. However, opportunities to visit places of worship and meet representatives from different faiths are limited.
- The school's specialist performing arts status enriches the RE curriculum through providing additional workshops to help students in their preparation for the international evenings.
- Despite many elements of the provision being good, the provision for students not taking the GCSE course at Key Stage 4 is very limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The head of RE has worked hard to establish a stable team of teachers who are committed to securing the effectiveness of this department. The team consists of three members of staff who meet regularly and ensure high expectations are maintained.
- A regular cycle of monitoring ensures that there is consistency in the quality of teaching and assessment, as well as providing valuable opportunities to share good practice. Members of staff work closely together to scrutinise students' work and discuss assessments. Students are set appropriate targets, which are monitored through team discussions.
- The department has an accurate picture of the areas for development and has appropriate plans in place to tackle these. The school is well placed to ensure the continuing improvement of RE.

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

The subject provides good opportunities for students to develop their learning skills. Students have opportunities to plan their work through research, consider how they are going to present their findings, and evaluate their own work as well as that of their peers. Good support is given to students to develop their skills in debating religious issues and considering different points of view before reaching a well-formed conclusion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the provision for RE at Key Stage 4 for those students not taking a GCSE in the subject
- 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 from different faiths.

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