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Mr E de Middelaer  
Principal  
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Dear Mr de Middelaer

Ofsted 2010-11 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 21 and 22 April 2010 to look at work 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.

- There is a strong trend of improvement in the full course GCSE results over the last three years. In 2009, the proportion of students attaining both the highest A\* to A grades and A\* to C grades were significantly above the national percentages. The great majority of students make good progress in their learning because of effective teaching. A small, but growing number of students choose AS and A-level studies in the sixth form. Students' attainment in these examinations is broadly average. Effective teaching, again, ensures that the majority of students make good progress.
- Students can explain the role and impact of religion in contemporary society confidently, showing a good level of understanding about key

religious beliefs and practices. Students' ability to explore and respond to religious and moral issues is particularly strong.

- Students are effective learners in RE when given opportunities to reflect on their learning and when assessing their own and other students' work. They generally demonstrate their evaluation skills well. The subject makes a good contribution to the ability of students to reflect on their own lives in the light of their learning about religion and belief.
- Students' personal development in the context of RE is good. They are very aware of the importance of understanding religious and cultural diversity in the college and in the wider world. The subject makes a particularly useful contribution to their spiritual development. Students behave extremely well in lessons and have very positive attitudes to RE.

### Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Subject expertise within the department is used effectively to support non-specialist teachers. They use good questioning skills to probe students' knowledge, thereby deepening their understanding of religion and its application to moral and social issues.
- Teachers successfully set introductory tasks to promote thinking and discussion. They explain lesson objectives well. In the best examples, the objectives are reviewed during and at the end of lessons. Teachers' planning includes a good focus on developing students' personal learning and thinking skills and these were evident in the lessons observed.
- A good variety of tasks and activities challenges and motivates the students. Learning is most effective when tasks are well suited to the different abilities and teaching ensures that all students participate in the learning. Students enjoy discussions and collaborative working. Good use is made of homework to extend learning.
- Assessment is good. It is an essential component of planning and teaching. Regular assessment ensures that students' progress is monitored and interventions are made when needed. Students have a clear understanding of assessment criteria and participate in peer-assessment knowledgeably. Teachers' marking and verbal feedback enable students to know how to improve their work. Careful analysis of GCSE and sixth-form examination results leads to suitable action. For example, the analysis accurately identified some underperformance of higher attaining boys in the 2009 cohort and action taken is leading to improvement this year.

### Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is planned well, taking into account the development of students' thinking skills. Although much of the curriculum is organised around the GCSE syllabus, teaching ensures that students'

knowledge and understanding are coherent. This is partly achieved through relevant links with other aspects of the curriculum, including citizenship and personal, social and health education. Visits to the local church and the Beth Shalom centre add to students' enjoyment of learning.

- The provision for AS and A-level study is increasingly more popular with the students who speak very highly of it, including the personal impact it makes on their lives. Other courses also make a contribution to the elements specified in the Leicestershire agreed syllabus and plans are in place to extend the provision further. However, the contribution of the provision to promote students' spiritual development and opportunities for students to explore questions about the meaning and purpose of life are underdeveloped post-16.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The shared responsibility for leading the department is effective. There is an obvious enthusiasm and passion for improvement. Over recent years, results in GCSE have improved strongly and there is a determined commitment to sustain and build further on success already achieved. Students have good opportunities to express their opinions about RE provision and the department acts on suggestions for improvement.
- The quality of self-evaluation is good, based on rigorous monitoring. As a result, the right priorities for improvement are identified accurately.
- The department has a strong teamwork approach, for example in devising units of work, which benefits the students directly. Resources are organised well and used efficiently. Opportunities for professional development, for example in relation to examination syllabi, are used well to improve teaching and learning. Less use is made of teachers observing each other to share the effective practice evident in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of learning opportunities in the sixth form to better meet the requirements set out in the Leicestershire agreed syllabus
- organising formal opportunities for teachers to share effective teaching practice within the department.

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala  
Her Majesty's Inspector