

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr B Walker
Headteacher
West Park School
West Road
Spondon
Derby
DE21 7BT

Dear Mr Walker

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 27 and 28 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 satisfactory with some good features.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- The results in the GCSE examinations for both the full and short courses have been below average in recent years. In 2009, around 59% of students attained A* to C grades in the full course based on a high level of entry. Around 11% attained these grades in the short course. The department has since changed its policy for entering students for both types of examinations to maximise students' chances of obtaining creditable grades. Current monitoring and results already obtained in Year 11 show a secure and rapid improvement in performance in both the short and the full course. The results represent at least satisfactory achievement for these students. Good progress in Years 10 and 11 is illustrated by students' ability to apply a broad range of skills in their studies, including

analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Students' skills of independent investigation and reflection are less well developed.

- Attainment at Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the expectations in the Derby agreed syllabus. Most students acquire a sound grasp of the key features of different religions and can offer thoughtful responses to issues of evil and suffering and questions about the existence of God. The most able students produce some good extended pieces of writing, clearly identifying what they have learnt from their study of religion.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is good. Students are very aware of the importance of understanding religious and cultural diversity in the school and in the wider world. The subject makes a particularly useful contribution to students' spiritual and moral development. They behave extremely well in lessons and have very positive attitudes to RE, reflecting the changes to the course of study to make it more engaging.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching of RE is satisfactory with a number of good features.

- Teachers successfully set introductory tasks to promote thinking; lesson objectives are explained well. Where teaching is most effective, a positive ethos for learning is established and relationships with students are positive. The use of a variety of tasks and teachers' good questioning, helps to probe students' knowledge and understanding. Good use is made of homework to extend learning.
- Subject knowledge is secure and non-specialist teachers are supported well with additional notes and resources. Occasionally, teachers' ability to structure the learning to ensure that all students make good progress in lessons is insecure. Sometimes, the learning is too controlled by the teacher restricting the opportunities for the students to exercise independence and get more involved in their learning.
- Assessment is an integral part of planning and teaching. Assessment tasks are generally challenging and end of unit tests enable students to demonstrate their attainment and progress. Teachers' marking of assessment tasks is helpful and students usually have a good idea of how to improve their responses. Some effective use is made of peer-assessment to involve students more actively in their learning. At Key Stage 3, the moderation of assessed work is not rigorous enough because teachers are not all involved in discussing the criteria for marking; the levels of attainment suggested in the agreed syllabus are not used sufficiently well to calibrate teachers' judgements.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. The schemes of work take good account of the Derby agreed syllabus. The curriculum is planned well,

taking into account the development of students' thinking skills. The strong focus on teaching about Christianity and Judaism enables students to progressively access the learning at GCSE level.

- The department has taken note of the recently reviewed agreed syllabus by including units, such as 'What makes a person inspiring to others?' and, 'Religion: Does it do any good?' These promote students' thinking and evaluation skills well.
- Opportunities for students to engage with speakers from a wide range of religious and belief communities are limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory with good capacity to improve.

- The department benefits from a specialist subject leader who supports the team effectively through well-organised learning resources. There is a strong commitment from all who teach the subject to raise standards and the drive to do so is showing positive results, indicating a good capacity to improve.
- Self-evaluation is broadly accurate, based on the monitoring of provision and the quality of students' work. The head of department keeps abreast of developments in the subject by attending a local forum for subject leaders organised by the local authority. Learning gained from these and other continuing professional development opportunities are disseminated to others in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teachers' moderation procedures in Key Stage 3 to ensure consistency in the use of assessment criteria
- extending the opportunities for students to have first-hand experience of members of religious communities through, for example, contact with visiting speakers.

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