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Mrs C Robson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Robson

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: identifying good practice in religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 28 June 2010 to look at work in RE. Please pass on my particular thanks to the RE department who made me most welcome.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: discussions with you, your head of faculty for humanities, RE subject leader and the local authority consultant for RE; a meeting with a group of students; and observation of a Year 10 RE lesson.

Features of good practice

- The RE subject leadership in the school is good. The school's effective provision for RE has been recognised by the local authority. RE is regarded highly within the school, as demonstrated through the appointment of an advanced skills teacher, in addition to your subject leader, to support the dissemination of good practice. A sense of common purpose is reflected in the good arrangements to support teachers' planning and professional development within the humanities faculty as well as the department. The use of shared planning by the four specialists in the department has enabled all teachers to talk about, plan and evaluate their teaching of the subject in a reasoned and professional way. This has resulted in a consistent approach to the teaching of RE throughout the school. As a result, the school's evaluations confirm that standards in RE are high and the quality of provision is good. The support of the senior leadership team has been an important part of this success.

- The guidance of the advanced skills teacher and the subject leader, linked with the effective use of the support materials from the local authority, has secured a high level of expertise across the department. Teachers are confident in teaching the subject and are working effectively to implement the distinctive learning process which underpins the new agreed syllabus. They are also aware that developments in RE could enable them to extend their thinking about a more skills-based and conceptual approach to learning.
- Students are able to use a range of skills when investigating and responding to religious material. They respond well at a personal level to the learning, asking more personal and incisive questions; as a result, they are able to understand the significance and impact of commitment and belief. For example, an effective Year 10 lesson was observed on the topic of 'matters of death' where students' achievement in the lesson was good, particularly their ability to interpret and analyse the personal significance of the topic. They also demonstrated a good ability to 'stand in the shoes' of a person of faith or non-religious conviction, to investigate issues from that perspective. Case studies, very sensitive teaching and excellent classroom management were used effectively to secure the good progress.
- The subject plays a major part in developing students' personal skills and well-being. It encourages students to take matters of faith and religion seriously and to respect the views of others. Students show curiosity, insight and reflect seriously on life's fundamental questions. They show an excellent understanding and respect of their own, and other people's, culture. In addition, many students said that the subject is making a distinctive and important contribution to their understanding of diversity in the society around them.
- The subject leader has adopted a sensible and considered approach to assessment in RE. Structured, manageable and levelled assessment tasks are in place. Some good use is made of self- and peer-assessment; this helps students to evaluate their own, and other's work. A detailed portfolio of exemplar material has been collected and teachers are encouraged to evaluate the learning process carefully to adjust future planning.

Areas for development

- At present, levels are not used to differentiate the activities for students in the planning. It would be worth considering whether this might provide a useful way of securing even faster progress in students' learning.

I hope that 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

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector