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Mr R Matthews
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Matthews

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 30 and 31 May 2012 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is inadequate.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is inadequate.

- Standards and progress are inadequate because there is no statutory provision for all students in Years 10 and 11. The small group of students taking GCSE generally reach their target grades.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 are in line with the expectations of the Hampshire agreed syllabus and achievement is satisfactory. Students consider a range of religious and human questions and issues. They understand key concepts such as freedom and sacred and can explain how these ideas relate to the beliefs and practices of religions. They are able to evaluate alternative responses to key issues, such as euthanasia.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. High attaining students do not reach their potential because the work is sometimes too easy.
- Many students enjoy RE and recognise its importance in relation to their life experiences. The subject is particularly valued by GCSE RE students. Because of the range of social and moral issues studied, the personal development of those students taking RE at GCSE is good. Behaviour is generally good and many students show interest in the subject.

Quality of teaching in RE

The quality of teaching in RE is satisfactory.

- Teachers have sound subject knowledge. Lessons are carefully planned and managed. Students are given a clear understanding of the purpose of their learning and the direction it will take. Tasks are well organised and students are praised regularly for their work.
- Learning outcomes are defined for each lesson but these are sometimes confused with tasks. As a result, assessments sometimes focus on checking whether activities have been completed rather than what has been learnt. Students enjoy the many opportunities for discussion but on occasion their opinions are not sufficiently informed by knowledge and understanding. Tasks sometimes do not allow students opportunities to carry out independent enquiries.
- Students are taught in mixed-ability classes but tasks are not always matched to individual needs. Higher attaining students do not always achieve well enough because they are sometimes left with nothing to do because they have finished early or the work is undemanding.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The quality of the curriculum in RE is inadequate.

- The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements because there is no provision for Years 10 and 11, with the exception of a small group taking GCSE classes after school. Consequently most students are unable to meet the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.
- The curriculum provision at Key Stage 3 engages most students. It makes some contribution to their oracy and literacy skills and links well with the school's commitment to UNICEF's Rights, Respect and Responsibility initiative. Students are encouraged to think about social issues and have sound awareness of the religious and cultural similarities and differences within society. Where it is taught, RE makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students have some opportunities for curriculum enrichment such as visits to a Mosque and Gurdwara in Southampton. However, RE provision does not take sufficient advantage of the school's performing arts status and few links exist with other subjects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory.

- The subject leader has great enthusiasm for the subject and where RE is taught, teaching is sound and most students enjoy the subject and make satisfactory progress.
- At Key Stage 3, RE is monitored regularly and effectively by senior managers and consequently the strengths and weaknesses in the subject are understood well and addressed punctually. Older students talk of the steady improvement in the quality of RE provision over the last three years.
- The subject leader benefits from annual training provided by the local authority and attends courses elsewhere. Senior managers encourage this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- fully meeting statutory requirements at Key Stage 4
- clarifying differentiated learning outcomes for lessons and ensuring that higher attaining students are sufficiently challenged
- providing a greater variety of learning activities in lessons, including opportunities for extended enquiry work.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill
Additional Inspector