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Mr David Booth  
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Dear Mr Booth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 and 3 October 2006 to look at work in religious education (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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and Standards

Pupils' achievement in RE is good.

- Pupils are set challenging targets and most of them make at least good progress and some, particularly boys, make very good progress. Few pupils under-perform. Broadly, achievement is better in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3.
- RE is a popular subject with most pupils and they respond positively in most lessons. Pupils generally have ample opportunities to reflect on and discuss their ideas. In addition they respond well to opportunities

to contribute to community activities and their personal development is good overall.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are generally challenging and there is a strong culture of encouraging pupils to think for themselves.
- In a lesson that was otherwise satisfactory, the attempt to cover too much detail and insufficient explanation limited the quality of outcomes.
- Good assessment systems have been established but teachers have different expectations of the standards needed to meet higher levels. As a result some work has been over-marked and pupils are not always clear enough about what they need to do to improve.
- Very good support is provided by teaching assistants. The department makes particularly good provision for gifted pupils.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 follows the guidance provided by Dorset LA but would benefit from cross reference to the agreed syllabus to ensure that all topics are included and that all strands of the attainment targets are achievable.
- The provision of full GCSE for most pupils is a strength of the subject. The focus on social and ethical issues makes a very positive contribution to pupils' learning and their wider personal development.
- The subject provides good support for basic skills, particularly of literacy.
- The department organises a good range of enrichment activities and opportunities to take on responsibility in the community, which make an important contribution to the school's voluntary controlled status.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the subject are good.

- The department has produced a detailed self-evaluation. Although it tends to be descriptive rather than evaluative, it makes realistic judgements that show the subject leader knows her department well.
- The head of department provides strong leadership and gives robust support for less experienced staff. She manages the evaluation of their teaching and their training needs well.
- The department has a strong commitment both to raising standards and promoting the personal development of pupils, although it needs to develop sharper practice in analysing data.
- The department has forged good reciprocal links with outside agencies. Speakers are brought in to give pupils first hand information and pupils contribute to the work of local charities.
- The subject sets itself challenging targets and is making good progress towards achieving them.

#### Implementation of the Agreed Syllabus

- The existing syllabus provides the basis for an intrinsically interesting curriculum. The department has used the guidance accompanying the new agreed syllabus to form a coherent scheme of work at Key Stage 3. However, this department needs to look more closely at the syllabus itself to inform future planning.

#### Inclusion

- The inclusion of all pupils is a particular strength. Pupils with learning difficulties are given good support and the department has produced innovative strategies for developing the potential of gifted pupils. The department successfully enters nearly all pupils for full course GCSE. The department makes very good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and the very able.

#### Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continue to work to improve aspects of teaching
- improve the quality and use of assessment information
- gain a secure understanding of the expectation of higher levels in RE.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Wintersgill  
Additional Inspector