

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs S Pryor  
Headteacher  
Swakeleys School  
Clifton Gardens  
Uxbridge  
Middlesex  
UB10 0EJ

Dear Mrs Pryor

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 and 13 December 2007 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of RE, the visit had a particular focus on the subject's contribution to the promotion of community cohesion.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in RE is outstanding and standards are well-above average.

- The standards pupils attain by the end of Key Stage 4 are well above average. GCSE results in RE are among the best in the school and are well above national averages. Almost all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make at least good progress and for many their achievement in the subject is outstanding.
- Achievement at Key Stage 3 is good although the progress made in Year 7 is not as strong as that in Years 8 and 9. By the end of the key stage, standards are well-above average. Year 7 pupils have very good

knowledge about religions and those in Years 8 and 9 have very good skills of evaluating religious and moral issues.

- The subject has an excellent ethos. All pupils spoken to had a high regard for RE, because of its intrinsic interest and personal value. They see the subject as useful as a context for developing their ideas, skills of reflection, and understanding of others.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is outstanding.

- The exceptionally high levels of achievement in RE are testimony to the excellent teaching in the subject. In this department with several non-specialists, some teaching is more effective, but, as the school's careful analysis of GCSE results shows, all groups made at least good progress. The department benefits from exceptionally skilled teaching from senior staff who, although not subject specialists, embrace RE teaching with enthusiasm and commitment.
- Pupils identify variety in teaching methods as one of the department's strengths. They enjoy the tasks and activities which enable them to learn so well.
- Any pupils under-achieving at GCSE or in the sixth form are identified early through monitoring, and immediate help is given to help them improve.
- The use of assessment for learning in RE is particularly effective. Termly assessments are recorded and monitored. Work is well pitched and suitably challenging for all pupils. Good use is being made of self-assessment but teachers are awaiting the publication of the revised agreed syllabus before introducing pupils to level descriptors.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The curriculum for Key Stage 4 and the 6<sup>th</sup> form option is excellent and is carefully monitored and reviewed.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is good although there is scope to review its effectiveness in the context of the implementation of the revised locally agreed syllabus. At present pupils get off to a relatively slow start in Year 7 where, although the teaching is excellent, the topics, which focus too heavily on the external phenomena of religions, do not build progressively on prior learning at Key Stage 2.
- The subject meets all statutory requirements except the requirement to teach RE to all pupils in the sixth form.
- There is excellent provision within RE to support development of the basic skills of literacy. The department maps links with other subjects and contributes to whole school initiatives such as a black history week.
- There are excellent links with the community, notably the Hillingdon interfaith group.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding

- RE is led outstandingly well by the Head of Department and her deputy with strong support from senior management. At all levels there is strong commitment to RE as one of the lead subjects in the school's humanities college status.
- There is excellent communication within the department through meetings, email, and the excellent weekly memo.
- Careful preparation for the absence of key staff has enabled the department to run effectively and to maintain high standards in the head of department's absence.
- The department has a lead role in supporting RE in primary and secondary schools in the borough. The department has also played a key role in the development of revision of the locally agreed syllabus.
- The head of department provides very good support for the non-specialists in the department enabling them to teach effectively up to A level standard.

## The contribution of RE to promotion of community cohesion

RE plays an outstanding and leading role in the school working closely with other subjects in promoting community cohesion. In particular, the department has provided a focus for links with SACRE and local faith communities. A youth interfaith group set up by the school and drawing from across the borough is planning a youth event in the borough. There are regular visitors to the school from faith communities.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in RE is outstanding. All pupils take the GCSE short course, and there are opportunities for those who desire it to take the full course. AS and A2 classes are heavily subscribed. There are excellent tracking systems in place to identify patterns of under-achievement and teachers take action to improve the achievement of pupils identified. Teaching ensures that learning is closely matched to the different needs of the pupils and, as a result, no groups of pupils under-achieve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using the opportunity provided by the revision to the locally agreed syllabus to review the Key Stage 3 schemes of work particularly in relation to work in Year 7
- introducing, when appropriate, level descriptions to help develop further the use of self-assessment.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop religious education in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and 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