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Dear Mrs Tabberer

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 and 04 March 2008 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in the 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is broadly satisfactory.

- All pupils follow the short GCSE course with a small number studying the full course. Standards at Key Stage 4, in recent years have been broadly in line the national average. However, they fell considerably in 2007 owing to a change in school policy on entering pupils for examinations. The standards of the work of the current pupils are broadly average and they are on course to meet their target grades. The progress made by Year 11 pupils in the lessons observed was satisfactory. They demonstrate the ability to think carefully and present

logical arguments about beliefs, ethics, and values. Results for the small number of pupils entered for GCE A level have been rising in recent years; standards attained in 2007 were at the national average, representing satisfactory achievement.

- While pupils' achievement at Key Stage 3 is uneven, it is satisfactory overall. Pupils have a growing appreciation of the impact that religion has on the way of life of individuals and communities. They apply their understanding of key features of religious belief, developing an ability to reflect and evaluate their own and others' beliefs about contemporary issues such as peace, conflict, and prejudice. For example, some pupils appreciate why it is sometimes easier for people to divide rather than unite citing possible consequences of division. Nevertheless, some higher ability pupils are not being extended sufficiently because some of the tasks they are set lack challenge.
- The personal development of pupils in RE is good. Most show a keen interest in religion and respect for the beliefs and practices of others. They enjoy the subject and say that it makes them think. Pupils spoke positively about the subject and its impact on their lives, particularly in helping them gain more confidence in expressing their own viewpoints. Good relationships exist between the pupils and staff and this contributes to a positive learning environment.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- Teaching successfully engages the interest of most pupils through the emphasis it places on the relevance of the subject to contemporary issues. This is the result of the good and wide ranging subject knowledge of the three specialist teachers.
- Relationships in all lessons observed were good; all pupils were fully engaged in their learning. In the best lessons, tasks were challenging, with teachers using appropriate questions to structure pupils' work.
- Significant attention is paid to developing assessment arrangements in RE. Teachers assess pupils' learning regularly; however, they do not use this information to plan subsequent lessons. As a result, sometimes work is insufficiently challenging particularly for the more able pupils. There are examples of developmental marking but this is inconsistent across classes and year groups.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum for RE broadly meets the requirements of the agreed syllabus. Pupils study a range of religious, moral and social issues from a variety of standpoints, resulting in a good balance of work covering both learning 'about' and 'from' religion.
- There is effective provision for all pupils in Key Stage 4 to study an accredited course, including those with significant learning difficulties. An increasing number of pupils opt to study Philosophy of Religion and

Ethics to A Level. However, the post-16 provision does not fully meet statutory requirements.

- The curriculum for Key Stage 3 lacks continuity and progression with some of the work in the units not building well enough on each other. This, coupled with the tendency to rely on commercially produced schemes of work, limits the challenge for the more able.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are satisfactory.

- The recently appointed head of department is an effective classroom teacher. She has a clear sense of purpose, which is enabling the new team to improve the outcomes for pupils. Together with the support of the senior leadership team, she has ensured that RE has become a popular subject, particularly at A level. She has begun to create a unified team, establishing successful team working with her colleagues.
- Regular monitoring of lessons by the head of department enables her to have an accurate view of strengths and areas for development in the subject. A useful improvement plan outlines the department's priorities.
- Structured assessment tasks have been introduced recently. However, as yet, judgements are not reliable or robust enough, particularly in Key Stage 3 and more use needs to be made of the outcomes to inform planning and to ensure learning is pitched correctly.

## The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a helpful contribution on the promotion of community cohesion; the teaching encourages respect for diversity. RE encourages pupils to be tolerant and to show respect for other people's views. There are no opportunities to link to the wider local community through fieldwork and contact with local religious groups.

## Inclusion

Many aspects of the provision for RE reflect a positive approach to inclusion; for example, no pupils are withdrawn from RE. Moreover, a number of pupils with significant learning difficulties study RE as part of their curriculum in the dedicated learning support base. In lessons observed boys and girls make similar progress. Planning needs to take more account of the different learning needs of all pupils, particularly the more able.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality, reliability and consistency of marking and assessment particularly at Key Stage 3
- ensuring continuity and progression in the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
Her Majesty's Inspector