

14 October 2008

Mr R McDonough  
Headteacher  
The West Bridgeford School  
Loughborough Road  
West Bridgeford  
Nottingham  
Nottinghamshire  
NG2 7FA

Dear Mr McDonough

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22- 23 September 2008 to look at work in religious education (RE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on the creative thinking 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. 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 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by students in RE are well above average reflecting good and sometimes outstanding achievement overall.

- Students arrive in the school with a pattern of prior attainment in RE which is below average. By the end of Key Stage 3 many attain standards, which are in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. At Key Stage 4, standards are well above average. Over the school as a whole, the achievement of students is good with most progress made at Key Stage 4. The proportion of students reaching the highest A\*/A grades in the full GCSE course is particularly impressive. In lessons at Key Stage 4 students make good progress in using the skills of enquiry, interpretation and evaluation effectively. Many are handling complex concepts confidently and can use a

good range of evidence and examples to justify their own ideas while providing a detailed evaluation of the perspective of others.

- Students in the sixth form are able to distinguish between opinions, viewpoints and beliefs in connection with various issues of conviction and faith. They are able to use a wide range of religious and philosophical vocabulary. Students critically evaluate the various interpretations of religion with careful reference to historical, ethical and philosophical ideas.
- The contribution of RE to the personal development of students is good. Most show a lively interest in religion and a keen respect for the beliefs and practices of others. They value the subject and recognise the contribution it makes to the development of understanding, respect and tolerance.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- Most lessons are well structured and orderly; classes are well managed and relationships with students are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their teaching.
- At its best, teaching is imaginative and lively. Lessons proceed at a good pace with effective use made of discussion, exposition and questioning. At Key Stage 4 and post-16 great care is taken to help students understand and prepare for the requirements of the examinations.
- At Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching and learning is more variable. Occasionally, some of the tasks set are not challenging enough to ensure that students are fully engaged, although the planning usually indicates how the learning should be adjusted to accommodate the varying ability levels in the mixed ability classes.
- Students' work is effectively assessed with good use made of self-assessment and developmental marking. As a result, students have a particularly clear understanding of their progress and what they need to do to be successful. Assessment tasks are purposeful and varied including, for example, extended and independent work with some more open-ended creative writing. Furthermore, on occasions, the level of insight shown by students in their written assessments is exceptional. For example, students offered well-structured reasons why Buddhists may reject the Western view of materialism.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- Students enjoy RE as evidenced by the high take up of the A level course. There is appropriate provision of core RE for students in the sixth form who do not study an accredited course.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is well conceived with good opportunities to promote literacy skills. Care has been taken to ensure that units of work build on each other extending the level of challenge. This is particularly important because of the decision to start full course GCSE for all in Year 9 and complete Key Stage 3 in two years.

- Overall, schemes of work are detailed with a consistent format in line with the provision of the agreed syllabus. The department is, however, aware of the need to consider whether the planning and delivery of some aspects of the curriculum are sufficiently differentiated to ensure the most able students are suitably challenged in all lessons.
- Good use is made of visitors to the classroom but less use is made of fieldwork opportunities.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good and some features are outstanding.

- Leadership of RE is well established with a drive for improvement and a strong sense of direction. The subject is very well organised on a day-to-day basis. The schemes of work are comprehensive providing a good basis for all the staff to work well together as a team.
- All aspects of the work of the department are driven by a shared commitment to high standards and the enrichment of students' wider personal development, resulting in the subject having a high profile in the life of the school and in the eyes of the students.
- The arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are very strong with excellent use made of the analysis of assessment data to evaluate students' progress.
- The arrangements for professional development are good. A range of well-conceived strategies has been used to develop generic teaching skills and an understanding of effective learning in RE. The subject is well resourced and there is good access to ICT to support teaching.
- The roles and responsibilities for RE are clear, with effective strategies in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision. A well-focused improvement plan for the subject is in place with a set of clear and appropriate priorities targeted on improving provision and raising standards.

## Creative thinking in RE

There are opportunities for students to think creatively about RE particularly in Key Stage 4 and post-16, where students critically evaluate the various interpretations of religion with careful reference to historical, ethical and philosophical ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- varying the use of tasks set in lessons to cater for the different abilities of the students
- ensuring teaching and learning is of consistent high quality across the department particularly in Key Stage 3.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop RE 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

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
Her Majesty's Inspector