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Dear Miss Boulton

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 February 2010 to look at work in RE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how well students are becoming effective learners 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is satisfactory and developing well, but with a few key aspects that need improving.

Achievement in RE

Achievement in RE is satisfactory.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with the Derbyshire agreed syllabus expectations and students' achievement is satisfactory. They have a sound understanding of religion and belief and are able to explain the impact of these on individuals and communities. Students also express their own views thoughtfully in response to what they learn about religions.

- Achievement at Key Stage 4 is no better than satisfactory, mainly because the time allocated for the subject is limited. Over recent years, a small number of students have opted into an examination course in RE and attained standards that are slightly below average. Currently, no students are studying RE at GCSE level, although senior leaders are confident that this will change from September 2010.
- The contribution of RE to students' personal development is good. Their attitudes to RE are positive and behaviour in lessons is good. The subject makes an important contribution to developing students' appreciation of religious and cultural diversity.

Quality of teaching of RE

The quality of teaching is good.

- Students experience a good range of tasks and activities which are matched well to their needs and interests. Teachers ensure students' active participation through directed questioning, opportunities for independent work and purposeful talk in small groups. Discussion is most effective when students have opportunities to challenge each other's thinking in a classroom climate which promotes respect for diversity.
- Lessons are well organised through detailed plans and students have a clear view of learning objectives which are suitable. Checks on learning during lessons ensure that the students make the expected gains.
- Ongoing assessment informs teachers' planning and their feedback through marking and verbal discussion gives sound guidance to students for improvement. A weaker aspect is the use of assessment to establish consistency and accuracy of teachers' judgements about students' progress over time.

Quality of the curriculum in RE

The curriculum in RE is variable but satisfactory overall.

- There is a strong commitment to improving a legacy of underachievement, reflecting the weaknesses in provision. Action is now resulting in a generally well-constructed curriculum at Key Stage 3 which takes account of the concepts and processes identified in the Derbyshire agreed syllabus. This ensures sound progression in learning and in the development of students' thinking skills.
- Good continuity into Key Stage 4 is restricted because the time allocation recommended in the agreed syllabus is not fully met.
- There is an effective promotion of learning where the curriculum planning and teaching require students to investigate and evaluate religious, philosophical and ethical issues. However, the provision is limited and students do not always have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of religion and belief to extend their understanding and skills.

- Links with local churches enrich students' experiences and there are plans to strengthen the contribution made from other religious and belief communities.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is satisfactory with a clear capacity for improvement.

- RE is part of the humanities faculty and staff are enthusiastic. A long period of instability in staffing for RE has now improved. In the great majority of cases, RE is taught by non-specialists who are committed to the subject and to developing it further.
- Routines of monitoring and evaluation are established and the humanities subject leader has identified suitable priorities which are focused on improving the quality of learning.
- Senior leaders recognise that continuing professional development for staff is essential to raising standards further in RE.

Subject issue: how well students are becoming effective learners in RE

Students are effective learners in RE when given opportunities to reflect on their learning and to extend their prior learning. Shortcomings in curricular provision limit students' ability to build on their investigative skills more progressively. However, the subject makes a modest contribution to the development of students' wider personal and thinking skills and students respond in some creative and imaginative ways.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving curricular provision so that it takes full account of the agreed syllabus requirements
- developing the quality of assessment and teachers' moderation procedures to ensure students have a secure understanding of their progress.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector