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Mr R Searle  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Searle

**Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: religious education (RE)**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 31 January and 1 February 2012 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE is good.

**Achievement in RE**

Achievement in RE is good.

- Over recent years, a very large proportion of students have been entered for the GCSE short course and a smaller proportion for the full course. In 2011, GCSE results were in line with national averages although there was a slight decline from the previous two years. Departmental monitoring of students' current attainment and progress indicates that the decline is being reversed quickly; in part this reflects the impact of more targeted and tailored teaching. By the end of Year 9, attainment is broadly in line with the expectations set out in the Surrey agreed syllabus and students' progress is satisfactory. They develop a good understanding of different religious beliefs and have a secure grasp of the influence of religion and belief on behaviour. However, their ability to apply the skills of analysis

and evaluation are underdeveloped, for example, when considering differences within religions.

- By the end of Year 11, students make good progress from their well below average starting points. They can apply the teachings from religion to the social and moral issues they study with growing discernment. More able students use their interpretation and evaluation skills effectively and express their own views in a balanced way. Students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities are being supported particularly intensively to address last year's underachievement. These students are currently making satisfactory progress.
- Students work in pairs and small groups willingly when required to do so. Across both key stages, students 'learn about' and 'learn from' religion in a balanced way. However, students' ability to show creativity, originality or imagination is underdeveloped, partly because they have fewer opportunities to carry out their own investigations in their work.
- Students' personal development in the context of RE is good. They value opportunities to discuss and explore religious and moral issues and say that their views and attitudes change in the light of their reflections about human experiences and religious teachings. They enjoy working in groups and learning from each other. They are clear about the importance of learning about, and valuing, cultural diversity in contemporary Britain.
- Behaviour in lessons is generally good and students have positive views about learning in RE. In discussions, students confirmed that disruption to learning is uncommon. In the very few instances where a small minority of students do not pay attention, strategies are quickly employed to draw them back to learning effectively.

### **Quality of teaching in RE**

The quality of teaching in RE is good.

- Teaching is well-organised, underpinned by secure subject specialist knowledge. Typically teachers use good questioning skills to probe and deepen students' understanding about religion and belief. Lessons usually start with engaging activities and students have a clear view of learning objectives.
- A good range of resources is used to enliven learning and ensure students' good progress. The use of discussion and debate complements the use of texts and worksheets. Varied tasks and activities usually engage students' interests and match their specific abilities. Teaching assistants support students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities well. The use of information and communication technology in the subject is a growing strength and the department recognises that more could be done to use technology further to enhance the quality of learning experiences.
- Assessment is fit for purpose. Checks on the quality of learning during lessons ensure that misconceptions are tackled quickly. Students have a secure view about the progress being made in relation to their targets.

Termly assessments, as well as ongoing assessment of work in lessons, provide teachers with information they can use to tackle underachievement. The routine marking of work gives students clear advice about what to improve. Occasionally, students are not provided with examples which show how to improve their work.

- Occasionally, when teaching is no better than satisfactory, there is an insufficient match of work to students' specific needs and abilities. An over-reliance on teacher talk leaves insufficient opportunities for students to practise their skills or experience a more diverse range of strategies for active learning and participation.

### **Quality of the curriculum in RE**

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- There is a strong commitment in the department to provide enriching experiences so that students can achieve well. Students develop positive attitudes and values, reflecting the department's success and a good rate of improvement from previous years.
- The schemes of work take good account of the Surrey agreed syllabus. Topics to be studied and how learning will take place are identified in considerable detail, often using questions as a framework to organise the learning. This also helps non-specialist teachers to provide planned teaching effectively.
- The provision of accredited courses raises students' motivation to succeed. The very recent introduction in Year 9 to begin the GCSE full course is capturing students' interest and building well on the foundations laid in Years 7 and 8.
- Opportunities for students to engage with visitors from a range of religious and belief communities are generally good. Visits to places of worship cover a broad range of religions and denominations. A 'multifaith' day last year, when a number of different visitors were invited to lead sessions, is remembered well by students. Younger students particularly benefited from the contributions made by some Year 10 students, explaining their religious beliefs and practices.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in RE**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in RE is good.

- The new subject leader, appointed in September 2010, has successfully continued to raise the profile of the subject in the school and changed students' perceptions so that they are much more positive. She is continually seeking improvement in the provision and in students' outcomes.
- Strengths and areas for improvement are accurately identified through careful evaluation and line management procedures. Effective use is made of reviews of students' work and teachers' planning, supported by lesson observations, to inform improvement planning.

- The department's good sense of teamworking and enthusiasm for teaching RE is very ably supported by the faculty leader and the senior leadership team.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better so that standards of attainment are raised to higher levels
- increasing opportunities for students to carry out investigations more frequently so that they can better demonstrate their skills of independence, creativity and evaluation, particularly in Key Stage 3.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and sent to SACRE. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Dilip Kadodwala**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**