

25 May 2007

Mr P Crowe
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Dear Mr Crowe

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Religious Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 May 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in RE is good.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are above the national average, as indicated by the full and short course GCSE results in recent years. This represents good progress from students' starting points in the subject. Students' achieve well in Years 7 and 8 and continue to make good progress in their studies in Year 9 when they begin the GCSE short course. The school has identified that boys' attainment is not as good as it should be compared to that of girls. The gap is wider than

that found nationally. Action has been taken to address this issue but has yet to be fully effective. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well. Teachers understand their specific needs well and provide suitable support.

- The contribution of RE to students' personal development is good. Students value opportunities to discuss and explore religious and cultural diversity. They think RE makes a positive contribution to their knowledge and understanding of religious and cultural diversity. They take an interest in how religion is portrayed in the media and can make balanced responses when asked to express their own opinions.
- Behaviour in lessons is good overall. The occasional inattentiveness and low motivation is managed effectively.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge which they use skilfully to probe students' knowledge, thereby deepening their understanding of religion.
- Teachers form good relationships with students which help to engage and motivate them. Challenging teaching enables students to make good progress. However, some learning, particularly amongst boys, is impeded because teaching takes insufficient account of their specific needs and preferred learning styles.
- When teaching is most successful, students are active participants in their learning. Some imaginative activities and tasks, for example through the use of music, art and poetry, enable students do make impressive responses reflecting their understanding of the spiritual and moral dimensions of life.
- Assessment procedures are satisfactory overall. There is an established tracking system which records results from regular assessments. The system helps to set challenging targets and to identify students who are underachieving. However, the levels used to chart students' progress are limited mostly to assessing students' knowledge and understanding and some aspects of their evaluative skills. The use of levels to assess how well students respond to learning from religion is underdeveloped. The criteria for marking assessed pieces of work are shared with students and feedback gives them clear guidance on how to improve their work. Self and peer assessment is underused as a means of involving students in their learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is good.

- The provision of both short and full GCSE courses is a notable strength. They contribute well to students' enjoyment of learning and sustain their motivation.
- Provision in Year 11 is closely linked to citizenship and personal, social and health education. An explicit module on 'religion in the media'

helps to promote students' understanding of the impact of religion on social and moral issues.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- RE is part of the humanities faculty which is well led and managed. A strong direction is given to improving students' achievement.
- Strengths and weaknesses in the subject are accurately identified through careful evaluation. Some effective use is made of data and lesson observations to support improvement planning, which are linked to overall school priorities.
- There is a strong appreciation of the contribution of RE to students' personal development. Most students have positive attitudes to learning and value the challenge it offers to make an impact on their lives.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

RE makes a positive contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. Students express a lively interest in exploring issues related to religious and cultural diversity. They respond well to opportunities to express their own views and feel their opinions are valued. Although in the past students have had opportunities to visit places of worship in the locality and more widely, these have reduced and students have limited engagement with religion in the community or with visiting speakers.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory. The department is committed to providing equality of access and helping students to achieve and enjoy in the subject. It is recognised that more needs to be done to improve the achievement of boys.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the standards attained by boys in order to narrow the gap between boys' and girls' attainment at GCSE
- extending the use of levels to assess not only how well students learn about religion, but also from religion.

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/SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector