OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

Inspecting post-16

religious studies

with guidance on self-evaluation

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIG
AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS
UNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION
HNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIG
THEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLO
IA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND
ODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIE
N LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING
ES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH
HYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY
ION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AN
JDIES SCIENCE SOCIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALT
CIOLOGY ART AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CAR
AND DESIGN BUSINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY
USINESS EDUCATION CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AN
ON CLASSICS DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIO
GN AND TECHNOLOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LA
LOGY DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS
THEATRE STUDIES ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATIO
ENGINEERING ENGLISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIG
LISH GEOGRAPHY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUS
HY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL
NMENT AND POLITICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION
TICS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDI
ND SOCIAL CARE HISTORY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LAW MATHEMATICS MEDIA EDUCATION MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUSIC PHYSICAL EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCIENCE

THE OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

HMI 313

© Crown Copyright 2001

Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Telephone: 020 7421 6800

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies are available, while stocks last, from:

The OFSTED publications centre
Telephone 07002 637833
Fax 07002 693274
email freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk

It may also be downloaded from the
OFSTED website (www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Reference number: HMI 313

The post-16 subject guidance series currently comprises: art and design; business education; classics; design and technology; drama and theatre studies; engineering and manufacturing; English; geography; government and politics; health and social care; history; information and communication technology; law; mathematics; media education; modern foreign languages; music; physical education; religious studies; science; sociology.

Contents

Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in religious studies for students post-16. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2001). It replaces the earlier guidance *Inspecting Subjects and Aspects 11–18* (1999).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to religious studies. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet is concerned with evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college and school sixth-form inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Our Inspection Helpline team, on 020 7421 6680 for schools and 020 7421 6703 for colleges, will be pleased to respond to your questions. Alternatively, you can email schoolinspection@ofsted.gov.uk or collegeinspection@ofsted.gov.uk.

OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In schools, this is the sixth-form provision. In colleges, the 16–19 age-group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

This booklet concentrates on General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced level (A-level) courses in religious studies (RS) for students 16–19. However, the principles illustrated in this guidance can be applied more widely.

If inspectors find that a school or sixth-form college is failing to meet its statutory requirements in respect of the provision of religious education for post-16 students, then they must report this.[1] This should be reported under Section 4 (Curriculum) for schools and under Key Question 5 for sixth-form colleges, not in any section on specialist courses in religious studies.

[1] In schools, the requirements for post-16 students are the same as for younger pupils. See the booklet *Inspecting Religious Education 11-16* for details. Sixth-form colleges are required to provide religious education for all students who wish to attend it, at a time when it is convenient for the majority of full-time students to attend.

Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As part of this responsibility, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met and any initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1957, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.[2]

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in religious studies enable all students to develop key skills, and how successfully the subject contributes to the students' personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the subject helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

2 See Annex *Issues for Inspection arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report)* in *Evaluating Educational Inclusion*, OFSTED, 2000, p13.

1 Standards and achievement

1.1 Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Draw on the school's *Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator* (PICSI) report or, in the case of a college, the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the school or college and any value-added information available. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data and analysing value added, refer to *Inspecting School Sixth Forms,* the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* and the *National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools.*

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

You should interpret, in particular:

- trends in results;
- comparisons with other subjects and courses;
- distributions of grades, particularly the occurrence of high grades;
- value-added information;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students' destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved and possible explanations for them. Follow these up through observation and analysis of students' work. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards which the current students are achieving. If they are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully. As with the performance data, be alert to any differences in the standards of work of different groups of students.

As you observe students in lessons, look at their work and talk with them, you should concentrate on the extent to which students:

- show knowledge and understanding of the key concepts within the chosen area(s) of study (for example, religious beliefs, teachings, doctrines, principles, ideas, and theories) and how these are expressed in texts, writings and/or practices;
- discuss the contribution of significant people, traditions or movements to the ideas and practices studied;
- use religious language and terminology in context;
- identify, investigate, analyse and evaluate the major questions and issues arising from the course of study;
- compare, contrast and evaluate the views of scholars and schools of thought;
- explain the relationship between the chosen area(s) of study and other specified aspects of human experience;
- offer personal insights and independent thought;
- relate elements of their course of study to their broader context and to specified aspects of human experience.

1.2 Analysis of students' work

AS and A-level work in religious studies is often characterised by copious notes. Care must be taken to focus on work which shows students' insights into the subject rather than routine notes. In your analysis of students' work, you need to pick out examples which illustrate whether they are able to select and demonstrate clearly the knowledge, understanding and skills you would expect from A-level students.

This applies also to examples of work for coursework modules. Take care here that your assessment is not over-influenced by the presentation of coursework projects. Effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to present projects deserves recognition as representing the development of key skills, but you must assess how well the students know and understand the course content.

Remember that the analysis of work is important for judging the nature of the demands made on the students and their progress over time. Hence, it can give valuable insights into their achievement.

Example 1: evidence from analysis of work of first and second year RS students in an FE college; they started the course mainly with 5 or 6 grade B/C GCSE passes.

Work from courses in 'Religion and ethics' and 'Hinduism'.

- *Files include clearly classified and labelled notes from lessons and personal/paired research, summary overviews, short tasks and essays. Most of the latter were word processed. Evidence that individuals and pairs have prepared and given presentations, sometimes using PowerPoint or Publisher.*
- *Also extensive evidence of the use of books, newspapers, specialist journals (eg, BJRE) and the Internet for independent research.*
- *Lesson and research notes are generally presented in a way that will facilitate retrieval – for example, with use of headings, sub-headings, bullet points and highlighting.*
- *Most writing is in an appropriate form: very good, consistent use of specialist vocabulary and high standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar.*

High levels of accuracy and relevance – students show a mature understanding of diversity of views; for example, they can explain and contrast convincingly the arguments a Christian might give against euthanasia and those of a Utilitarian using the Hedonic Calculus. Students make mature responses to the issues they have studied; for instance, they argue clearly whether genetic engineering should be condoned by any right-thinking religious person and present arguments for and against the claims of determinism. Students compare, contrast and evaluate perceptively the views of scholars – eg, Leipner and Burghart – on the claim that Hinduism is a 'religion'. They make full and effective use of evidence to sustain an argument; for example, they draw on evidence from ISKCON, Swaminaryans and Arya Samaj in considering whether the sampradayas are more likely than the Brahmin-based traditions to secure the perpetuation of Hindu values and culture in the Diaspora. Systematic reasoning and the analysis of such issues enable students to reach appropriate conclusions, and the highest attainers show evidence of independent thought; especially regarding ethical issues.

It is clear that, through careful monitoring by the teachers and the use of paired work for drawing up improvement strategies, the work of both year groups shows very good improvement over the year. For example, they apply ethical theory over a wide range of contexts by sharing, exchanging and comparing information.

The Hindu students in the group make significant contributions and are generous with resources, information and access to contacts.

The quality of the work in relation to previous attainment and the mature use of a broad range of sources both indicate very good achievement.

[Attainment well above average (2)]

Commentary

Most students are able to select and present relevant factual information, ideas, descriptions and arguments in a highly organised manner. They show understanding of the nature and significance of what they have learnt. They demonstrate a high level of understanding of religious language, terminology and concepts. They appreciate the religious, ethical and historical significance of the material studied and of scholarly approaches to the syllabus area. They relate the material clearly and effectively to issues in religion and ethics, sustain a critical line of argument and justify a point of view.

1.3 Talking with students

Structured discussions help to assess the level at which students are working and thinking. Setting focused questions gives the opportunity to explore understanding of concepts and the students' ability to use them in different contexts. Examples from students studying the New Testament and Christianity might be as follows.

- *I see from your files that you all had to give a presentation contrasting Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives. Tell me what you learnt from this task.*
- *In the lesson I visited this morning, you were studying the emergence of women priests. Why do you think this is such a big issue for many Christians?*
- *I am interested in your current assignment – writing an evaluation of the BBC series* Son of God*. What questions are you asking? What would you say so far about the accuracy of the programme? How do you think a parish priest might respond to it, knowing that thousands of people are watching?*
- *Why do you think Christianity was so successful, in spite of Roman and Jewish opposition? The crucifixion of the group's first leader wasn't a promising start was it?*

Example 2: evidence from a discussion with 6 AS-level students in a sixth-form college; all but one had high GCSE results before coming to the college – typically, about 8 GCSE passes at grades C or above, with several A/A*s.

- *Students say they were attracted to the subject because they liked studying ideas and believed that the skills deployed in RS would complement their other subjects well. These are mainly English, history, philosophy and sociology, but one is studying music and two have chosen art. All are so far engrossed in the course and have no regrets. They are working hard.*
- *They recognise a huge leap to AS – in particular, they have noticed the increase in difficulty of resources – from GCSE text books to specialist journals and periodicals. They are all relying heavily on teachers' notes and digests of resources.*
- *Three are practising Christians – two of whom are struggling to adapt to critical evaluation of their 'sacred text'. This is particularly evident in the comparison of the two infancy narratives. These two students are reluctant to accept any suggestion that the outlook of the two authors might have influenced the literal truth of their accounts. This prevents them from asking appropriate questions about Matthew's and Luke's backgrounds.*
- *Most of the others can talk knowledgeably and with understanding about the Jewish framework of Matthew's narratives, by referring to the fulfilment of prophecy, the genealogy and the dreams. They make interesting comparisons between the flight into Egypt, Moses and Hosea's prophecy. In contrast, they point to specific features in Luke's account as evidence of his 'more human' presentation.*
- *All students want to talk about women priests. Only two are yet able to argue objectively, leaving behind their own feminist views. These two, although sharing the majority opinion, are able to explain succinctly why many Christians do not share their opinion. They can refer to relevant Biblical quotations, arguments from tradition and the views of contemporary writers – eg, Canon Austin. The rest waver between debating women priests, wider issues of feminine theology and their own views on the place of women in religion generally.*
- *Most have found the BBC programme a helpful stimulus in developing their own understanding of the person of Jesus. They praise the graphic images of Israel at the time of Jesus, which correspond to their research on the Hebrew University website (where they have checked for accuracy). They criticise the programme for being theologically lightweight – absence of attention to Jesus' teachings or messianic concepts other than the military messiah – eg, no reference to the Son of Man. They show good understanding of some of the central concepts in the synoptics in this discussion.*

- *Students have a good understanding of Christianity as part of Judaism in the first century, and they recognise the synagogue as a place for dissemination of new ideas, especially in the Diaspora. They recognise the significance of St Paul and the mission to the Gentiles and, later, 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'. Understand the waning interest in Greek/Roman gods and the search for a new belief. Recognise that the faith of the missionaries was a deciding factor. All have a good grasp of this issue – believe they remember it well because they have researched it themselves.*

The positive features of attainment outweigh the negatives. However, in the light of their previous attainment, achievement may be unsatisfactory.

[Attainment average (4)]

Commentary

The standards of attainment in this group are very mixed, from good to below average. Students' knowledge is good, especially of aspects of Church history. Their understanding varies, depending on their use of relevant evidence and examples. They can all explain different views on some topics, sometimes with supporting text or argument, and the best students offer critical analysis. They demonstrate good understanding of religious language, terminology and concepts, and are beginning to compare and evaluate scholarly approaches to the syllabus area and to sustain a critical line of argument and justify a point of view.

Further investigation is likely to be needed to see whether these students are achieving well enough in relation to their ability.

1.4 Lesson observation

Evidence about students' knowledge, understanding and skills can be also assessed in a lesson.

Example 3: evidence from an AS-level RS lesson in a school sixth-form; 60 min observation, 5 students present.

Judaism – the historical foundations.

The teacher conducts an opening question and answer session, using extracts from the Old Testament on the theme of 'Covenant'. Students are able to work out the connection between the Covenant between God and Israel and a contemporary legal covenant. However, they have difficulty understanding the one-sided nature of the Covenant, partly because of weaknesses in their existing repertoire of theological terms. Students are uncertain of the historical background to the Ten Commandments and do not immediately associate them with the Covenant. They are ignorant of the term 'grace'. Their lack of previous knowledge of Judaism hinders their understanding of God's centrality in Jewish life (eg, through ritual and worship). The Sabbath is a dim memory from Year 7 and students have forgotten the details that would enable them to argue for the Sabbath as an aspect of the Jews' 'part of the covenant bargain'.

Recognising that she is getting nowhere with abstract concepts such as Covenant, the teacher turns to revision of Abraham and Moses – on whom students are equally ignorant – eg, they can remember, vaguely, that Moses was found in the rushes but they can only define a prophet as 'someone who can see into the future'. The last 20 minutes of the lesson are spent in private reading.

[Attainment below average (5)]

Commentary

Because of their lack of background knowledge, there is little coherence in students' knowledge and understanding of Judaism. They know isolated pieces of relevant information and see connections once they are pointed out. Their knowledge and understanding are not yet at a level where they can engage in debate. Reading is superficial and their lack of understanding prevents them from engaging in the writings of scholars.

2 Teaching and learning

2.1 Evaluating teaching and learning

Inform your views of teaching and learning by reference to the characteristics of effective RS lessons, where:

- teachers demonstrate their own enthusiasm for a rigorous study of religion and so stimulate students' curiosity *(teachers' subject knowledge and understanding, methodology);*
- teachers use an enquiring, critical and empathetic approach to the study of religion *(methodology);*
- teachers help students to understand concepts through the skilful use of models and analogies – for example, use of a chocolate cake to illustrate the concept of desire in Buddhism *(methodology);*
- students' understanding is deepened because teachers recognise how and why generalisations break down, and are able to cite and explain exceptions – for example, by comparing the attitudes of Gujuratis and Punjabis to goyani *(subject knowledge, methodology);*
- students gain a sound understanding of the key concepts within the chosen area(s) of study (eg, religious beliefs, teachings, doctrines, principles, ideas and theories) through effective and clear explanations which avoid misconceptions and correct mistakes in students' thinking *(subject knowledge, methodology);*
- students' understanding (eg, of the contribution of significant people, traditions or movements) is extended and deepened by questions such as 'What if …?', 'Why is ...?' and 'What are the implications of…?' which go beyond simple one-word answers and build on and develop ideas to challenge students to think *(subject knowledge, methodology, expectations, assessment);*
- students extend their knowledge and understanding through teachers' consistent use of correct religious language and terminology *(subject knowledge, methodology);*
- students extend their ability to analyse and evaluate major issues and questions arising from the chosen area(s) of study, by completing challenging tasks and assignments *(methodology, expectations);*
- students are required to read, interpret and evaluate the views of scholars relating to their chosen course(s) of study, not just take notes and interpretations from the teacher *(methodology, expectations);*
- students' interest is captured because teachers make connections between the chosen area(s) of study and other specified aspects of human experience *(subject knowledge, methodology).*

Less effective teaching might reflect some of the following:

- spoon-feeding students with the content, arguments and conclusions beforehand, for use in tasks and assignments *(expectations);*
- requiring students to take down or copy excessive notes, without checking that they have understood *(methodology);*
- providing trivial time-consuming and inefficient tasks which do not help students to make progress in their understanding – for example, surfing the Internet without a clear focus or without previous guidance on suitable sites *(methodology, expectations);*
- using questioning to pursue ideas, where the questions are superficial or demand only one-word answers, and discussion never 'gets under the skin' of the concepts being taught *(methodology, expectations).*

2.2 Lesson observation

Example 4: evidence from a Year 12 AS-level RS lesson in the sixth-form of a girls' school; 24 students present.

Lesson on Buddhism – impermanence.

Very good exemplification of impermanence – danger of getting too hopeful about the weather. Teacher explains very well that discovering the Path is an aide to understanding the Noble Truths – very good at giving concrete allegories for difficult concepts. For example, a poem about honey gives you no idea what it tastes like – you have to eat (experience) it. Very good-quality explanations. These are difficult concepts. Students initially struggle to put them into words, but teacher's reference back to the concrete is a helpful model. This leads the students to develop the allegory and, as a result, they advance their understanding very well. For instance, they explain 'desire' with reference to chocolate cake – can deny self or eat to excess; Middle Path = have one piece and realise there can be no more – recognise it is impermanent. Very good at relating everyday experiences to Buddhist ideas (eg, that the enjoyment of eating chocolate cake must be greater than the fear of not getting any). Teacher relates impermanence to meditation well.

He manages the group work very efficiently – each group works on one Noble Truth. Teacher very effective in joining in group discussions – moves well between groups, suggesting new avenues of enquiry, which help the students to improve their discussion. Highly successful development of students' understanding – analysis of the First Noble Truth with reference to the Buddha's own experience of unhappiness, in spite of his rich lifestyle based on 'more is better'. They relate his discovery that all life is suffering back to his experiences away from the palace. Groups learn from each other – eg, Second Noble Truth group illustrates how the answer to desire is no-self; Third Noble Truth group explains the concepts of permanence and impermanence; Fourth Noble Truth group deals with the concepts of morality, meditation and wisdom.

These are able students who are being stretched to their limits. They are comfortable with abstract concepts – can write about them and discuss. They have extensive knowledge of Buddhism and are able to relate new knowledge to existing understanding, cross-referencing and comparing as they learn.

[Teaching and learning excellent (1)]

Commentary

The teacher shows excellent subject knowledge and understanding in the way he presents and discusses his subject. He challenges and inspires the students, expecting the most of them, and this is highly effective in deepening their knowledge and understanding. The use of group work is a very effective method of stretching the students and making very good use of the time.

Example 5: evidence from a Year 13 (autumn term) A-level RS lesson in a school sixth-form; 6 students present, 1 male.

Beginning work on Utilitarianism (Ethics paper). Research and general reading set in advance.

Lesson planned and structured to create a logical progression of ideas with some cross-referencing to earlier learning. Lesson objectives displayed and understood: to consolidate understanding of Utilitarianism and evaluate its usefulness as a philosophy for life. Teacher's subject knowledge is good.

Teacher checks previous reading (set last week) – tests students on it briefly – gets them to describe the social and historical context for Mill and Bentham. Two students, who are less clear and concise in their explanations, are lacking in confidence. She is effective in reassuring them, telling them that she will go over the work with them later.

Lesson moves into seminar mode – teacher gives students a passage to read – she flags a few useful questions for students to think about as they read new material. This helps them to focus on important issues in their note-taking and highlighting – eg, 'Think about how Bentham's theories compare to Christian teachings.' Interaction is courteous rather than enthusiastic.

Teacher invites explanations of the main points, to which she makes little or no comment. She uses board to sketch a flow chart of the progression of Utilitarian theory from Hutchinson to Sidgwick. Students copy without discussion. Teacher asks more factual questions. Two less confident students handle these questions well but others find them easy to deal with, so gain little from this part of the lesson.

*At this point, the two lower-attaining students (both have several grade Cs at GCSE; the rest of the group have several As and A*s) are given additional tasks to secure their understanding of Utilitarianism. They are set to work on the computer. They make progress, but slowly: they find abstract concepts difficult and say they enjoy the Islam lessons more – more factual.*

Students learn at a reasonable rate by applying theory to practice – eg, they work out whether, by Utilitarian theory, eating a bar of chocolate or learning a foreign language would be more pleasurable.

Once the group has grasped the basic theory, teacher increases the level of challenge. She poses more difficult questions, requiring the comparison and application of knowledge, such as 'Why might a Christian disagree with Utilitarian theory?' and 'What are the implications of Utilitarianism for a democracy?'

Lively and controversial discussion develops – most students are confident in challenging each other's views.

In the excitement, teacher lets the lesson over-run. She does not leave time to consider what has been learned or for students to record notes of the discussion, as the lesson plan intended.

[Teaching and learning satisfactory (4)]

Commentary

The teacher shows good subject knowledge. Interaction with students keeps them on track but does not generate enthusiasm. Learning is satisfactory and the teaching is competent. The way she challenges illogical arguments and takes the debate forward by asking difficult questions contributes to the learning. At other times her questioning is rather pedestrian and the students reinforce learning rather than move on. Students show satisfactory understanding in the discussion of their preparatory reading and in the later discussion. The preparation of tasks suited to students of different abilities is effective in ensuring that all students make reasonable progress, working at a level appropriate for them.

Example 6: evidence from a second year A-level RS lesson in an FE college; 70 min observation, 6 students: 4 Hindu male students and 2 non-Hindu 'white' female students present.

Hinduism option: introduction to 'caste'

The lesson is carefully planned to build students' confidence and knowledge of 'the caste system'. Students are all given photocopies from Killingley – one copy each of Vertovec, Lipner and Nesbitt is on the table. Students work in pairs to list in columns the characteristics of varna and jati. They work quietly and mechanically while the teacher writes his own summary on an OHT.

The pairs identify the main similarities and differences, but for the most part they ignore the inevitable diversity within Hindu tradition (eg, in some sources, varna can be earned rather than inherited). Most fail to observe (as does teacher) that jati is not exclusive to Hindu groups. The teacher's limited knowledge of the subject has led to the students' failure to understand the issue in sufficient depth.

Teacher then moves on to examine how varna and jati relate to gender. Teacher's knowledge has been gained largely from textbooks rather than from the Hindu community, and this section of the lesson is not handled sensitively. He has made assumptions about the common backgrounds of the four Hindus in the class and has not realised that two are Ravidasis (looked down on as low or no caste by the others). Complications ensue as the Hindu male students offer alternative (and differing) answers to the teacher's questions, based on their own community experiences. Teacher becomes confused over which are the 'right' answers. Students also become confused as teacher gives them stereotypical answers regarding the depressed place of women.

One student (a Brahmin) has emailed a well-read Brahmin relative in India and been told that textual authority for the historically subordinated role of women is to be found in the Manusmriti, where women are classed alongside low caste sudras and chandalas (outside the caste system). This student tells the class that restrictions on women in Manusmriti are seen as binding for the twice born varna but of less importance for those of lower status. The teacher applauds this contribution, adding that, historically, a man must honour his wife but control her and keep her focused on domestic duties. He says that women should be under the protection of fathers, brothers and husbands and should never be independent, owing to weak, fickle nature. A woman should serve her husband as a god, bear him sons and not re-marry if widowed.

The Ravidasis take offence at this and the non-Hindus in the class protest against what they perceive as the secondary social status of women. Confusion results. The Ravidasis take exception to what they perceive as insulting references to chandalas; one Hindu in the class has strong ties with the Swaninaryan movement which decries caste and the two non-Hindu students ridicule what they perceive as a sexist religion.

The teacher's subject knowledge is not adequate to the task of sorting out the muddle. He has taught the Hindu option at the wish of the Hindu students. However, he did not think to research the composition of the local community or to understand the potential sensitivities in teaching about caste to a generation for whom issues of jati seniority are generally irrelevant. He fails to develop and draw parallels with other religions which have similar issues.

Meanwhile the students through their discussion begin to iron out the difficulties for themselves. The questions from the non-Hindus in particular help the Hindus to recognise the differences between them and the reasons for those differences. The teacher plays little part in this discussion – it would have been helpful if he had kept notes for monitoring purposes.

Teaching unsatisfactory (5); learning satisfactory (4)

Commentary

The teaching is unsatisfactory because of the teacher's lack of detailed subject knowledge – in particular, his failure to recognise the wide diversity of views – and because of his failure to identify in advance the range of backgrounds of the Hindu students in his class. For a significant part of the lesson, this results in confusion and misunderstanding for the students.

In the end, the learning is made (just) satisfactory by the students themselves, who are mature enough to listen to each other to discuss their different views. As a result they do eventually come to understand the different backgrounds and viewpoints, but this understanding would have been achieved much more efficiently if the teacher had better knowledge at the start of the lesson of the subject and of the students.

Example 7: evidence from a Year 12 A-level RS lesson in a school sixth-form; 12 students (5M, 7F).

This is the school's first ever A-level group. The course covers: (a) philosophy of religion; (b) Islam.

Very good learning taking place, to a large extent as a result of very good ICT facilities. Students are researching in order to write a 700-word article for The Philosophy Magazine *in the magazine's house style.*

Students are working in pairs, searching the school's intranet and the Internet for information and views. There is good co-operation and constant dialogue – eg, suggesting further sites to explore, identifying key words, comparing the information in different sources, and working together on DTP.

The RS teachers have included on the intranet a list of all philosophers in the syllabus. Each entry has links to the learning objectives for AS and to the full range of resources available in school, including the on-line resources. This is of immense value – it would be difficult for students to find this information elsewhere. Head of department has written some material for the course (on the intranet) where it was not available elsewhere. This is particularly valuable in the case of living philosophers (eg, Swinburne) about whom there are few books. As a result of accessing this information, the students are making rapid progress. They are totally conversant with the use of the

intranet/Internet and comment that the speed with which they can find information encourages them to probe – eg, Swinburne as a proponent of argumentative theism. Students suspect that without ICT resources they would possibly check 'argumentative theism' in one or two books. By using search engines, they have access to international views of this issue (and Swinburne) and through links are taken to other relevant questions.

Teacher has very cleverly focused the task to prevent students submitting downloaded text as their own work. Every task requires students to process and select information. Rather than 'give notes', teacher is free to discuss, probe and suggest.

[Teaching and learning very good (2)]

Commentary

The factors which lead to this very good learning are the provision of very good ICT facilities, the students' ability to make effective use of these resources and the very effective background/preparatory work. In doing this, the teachers have identified sources of information which will support the students' learning. In a lesson like this, where students are working individually or in pairs, there may be less evidence of the quality of teaching during the lesson itself. In this case, there is clear evidence of the quality of teaching in terms of planning and expectations. Not only have suitable sources been identified, but others have been written and some edited to make them more accessible to students of this age and ability. The task was carefully designed so that it was not possible for students merely to copy downloaded text.

2.3 Other evidence on teaching and learning

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experience and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and, therefore, the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example, it will indicate whether students routinely use a wide range of source materials, whether they are introduced to the views of scholars and whether they are challenged sufficiently to develop the higher order skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to show whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

3 Other factors affecting quality

Evaluate the quality and impact of the curriculum, staffing, resources, accommodation, leadership and management, and report on them if they have a significant bearing on what is achieved. The following are examples of factors which may be important in religious studies.

Management and curriculum

It is important that colleges and schools take care in the choice of the units to make up the course followed and that sufficient time is allowed for each, avoiding imbalances which could adversely affect students' knowledge and understanding. This is particularly important for their performance in a synoptic paper, where it is crucial for them to link together different strands of religious studies and to have the confidence to take an overview.

Resources

Consider the extent to which students' personal studies and investigations are enhanced by interviews with faith community representatives and visits to places of worship and museums. The effectiveness of students' use of artefacts, photographs, videos, audio tapes of interviews and ICT printouts will need to be evaluated as part of the analysis of their work.

4 Writing the report

The following is an example of a post-16 subject section from a school inspection report. (It does not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) Where the subject is inspected in a college, it is likely that the evaluation will be given within a report on a broader range of humanities courses. The summative judgements in these reports use, for schools, the seven-point scale: *excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.* For colleges there is the five-point scale: *outstanding; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; very weak*. The summative judgements *excellent/very good* used in school reports correspond to *outstanding* in colleges; *poor/very poor* used in schools correspond to *very weak* in colleges.

Religious studies

Overall, the quality of provision in religious studies is **good.**

Strengths
- Students achieve well; results in recent years have usually been above national averages.
- Students show good understanding and Year 13 students are able to articulate their views with confidence.
- Teaching is good; lessons use a range of activities, which are effective in helping students to improve their knowledge and understanding.
- The subject is well led and there are good and effective links with the local Muslim community.

Areas for improvement
- There are no formal procedures in place for monitoring the progress of individual students.

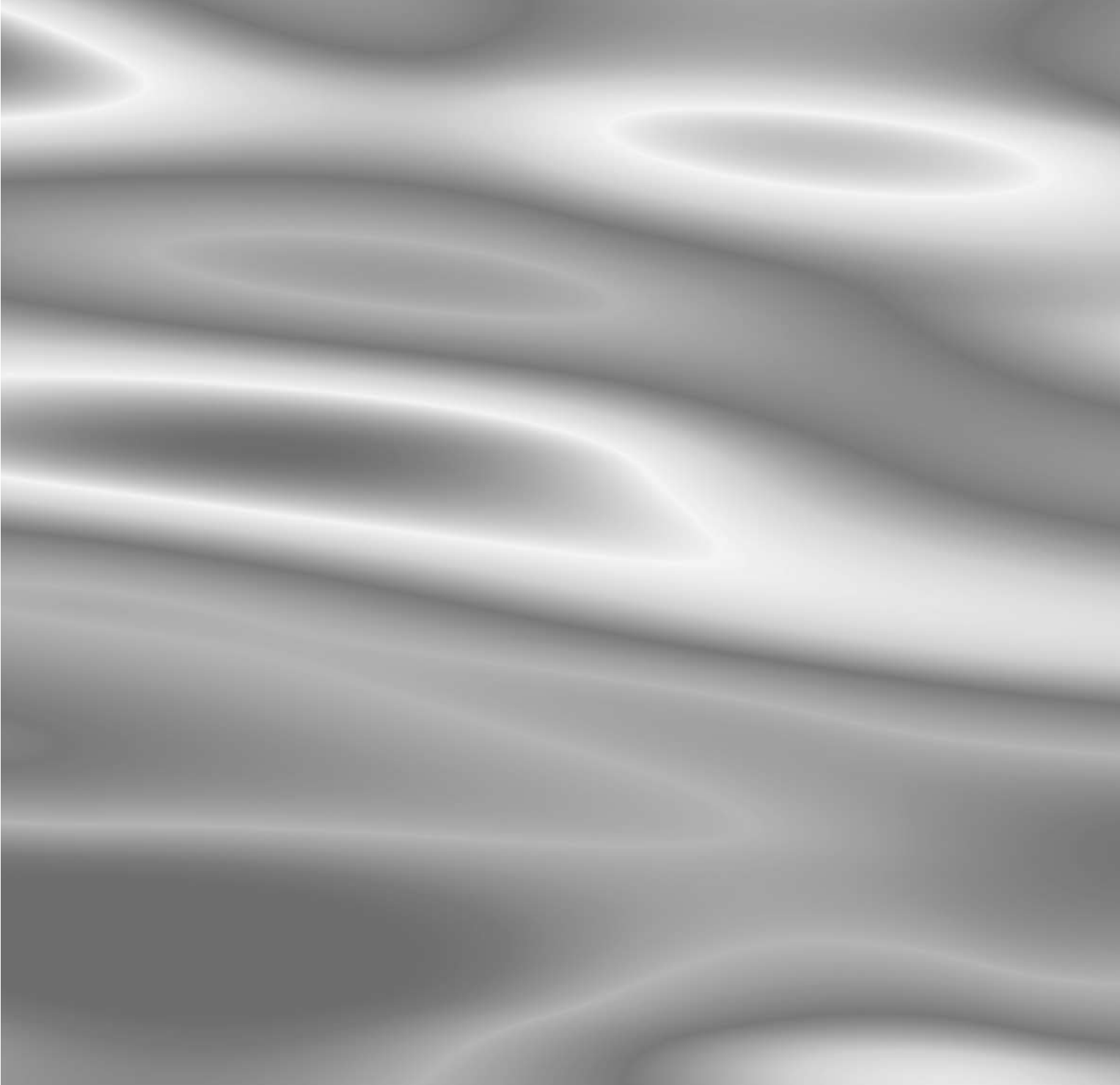
Standards are above average, although they showed a dip last year. In the GCE A-level examination, all of the 12 students who took the subject completed the course and gained a pass grade, but only two of them gained grade A or B. This is a considerably smaller proportion than the national average. However, the school's records of students' attainments before they started the course show that the students who completed the course last year had made good progress from a relatively weak starting point, and so their results represent good achievement. There are no significant variations in standards attained by male and female students or by those of different ethnic groups.

The work seen during the inspection, both in lessons and from an analysis of samples of students' writing, confirms that students are achieving well, attaining above average standards. They show good understanding and judgement in their critical analysis of texts. Their files are generally well organised. Essays contain mainly accurate and relevant information; historical questions – for example, about the opposition to Muhammad in Mecca – are structured to support coherent conclusions. Essays on abstract ideas such as Hick's soul-making theodicy show considerable depth of understanding, making good reference to evidence, examples and scholarly opinion. Year 13 students write with confidence, expressing their views clearly, as with their assessments of Paley's argument for the existence of God. Some Year 12 students have been slower to develop fluency in whole-class debate, but are now learning to rely less on the teacher as the sole source of accurate information. Students' files include extensive and appropriate use of ICT and students show good judgement in questioning the provenance of information they obtain from Internet sites.

Overall, teaching is good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject. Lessons move at a good pace, and make effective use of a variety of activities to develop understanding. For example, one lesson started with paired discussions on the importance of the outward actions of prayer in Islam. In other lessons, students analysed passages from the Qur'an and Hadith in evaluating the view that women in Islam have high and equal status. Students respond well to this approach; they show a lively interest in the subject, work with enthusiasm and make good progress. On occasions, the shared investigations of some of the weaker students lead to some inaccuracies and confusions; when this happens the teachers compensate well with supportive and helpful summaries. Teachers make excellent use of visits to Islamic centres, visiting speakers, video clips and slides to enrich students' understanding. Students make good use of the wide range of cultures represented in their community – for example, by drawing on information from their Sikh and Hindu friends when researching for their independent study.
The teaching is carefully and tightly planned to introduce concrete material early in the course, progressing to the complex issues and concepts in the syllabus. For example, in one Year 12 lesson, students gave clear presentations

on Hume's argument against the occurrence of miracles and showed growing confidence in their grasp of criticisms of the argument. Teachers give exceptionally focused attention to study skills, which are built into all activities and assessed. Work is marked with care, and the teachers' written comments give students particularly helpful guidance to show them how they can make further improvements to their work. The progress they have made during the course was evident in the work which was analysed during the inspection – for example, from their work on the Islamic doctrine of God and comparisons between scientific and religious understandings of the universe.

The subject is well led and managed. The two teachers involved in the sixth-form course work well together, sharing views on successful ways of teaching. The head of department has made arrangements for several leading philosophers and leaders of the local Muslim community to come to speak to A-level classes. Very good work has been done to develop the use of the Internet as a resource, providing links to enable students to find material relevant to the course which is not available elsewhere. Although the teachers know their students well, there are no formal procedures for monitoring the progress of individual students.



Designed and produced by Matrix Print Consultants Ltd, Rothwell, Northants 01536 713811