

9 January 2019		ITEM: 5
Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education		
Integrated Communities		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Deborah Weston: Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

In April 2018, the government published an "Integrated Communities Green Paper" that *"invites views on the government's vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities."* This paper invites members of SACRE to consider what recommendations it might make to the council to revitalising religious education in Thurrock so that it might play its part in improving community integration, locally, regionally and nationally.

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

- **Requests that an item be placed in the Headteachers' Bulletin**
- **Reminding schools of their statutory duty to promote community cohesion**
- **Requests schools share evidence of good practice that might be circulated to others as examples of how religious education supports this work.**
- **Inviting them to send a delegation of children from their school to a SACRE Youth Conference: 'Respect for all' on Wednesday, 5th June at Thurrock Adult Community College, Richmond Rd, Grays RM17 6DN**
- **Conducts an investigation into the nature and extent of pupils being withdrawn from religious education or part thereof**

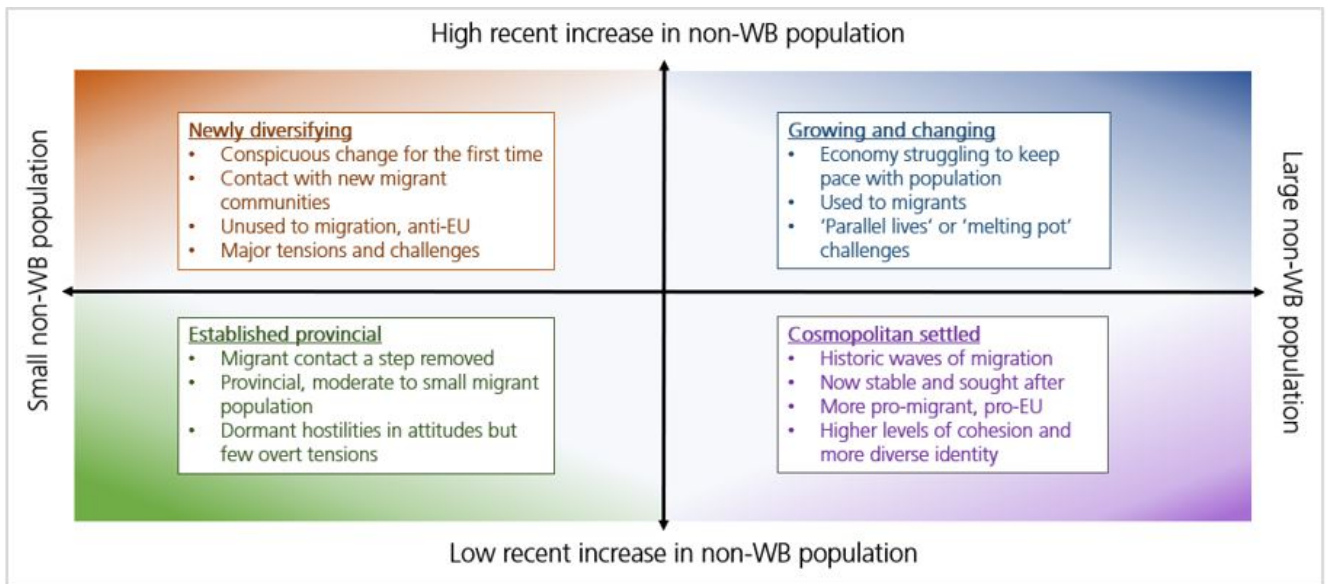
2. Introduction and Background

The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper focuses on addressing those factors which the available evidence suggests act as the main drivers for poor integration. These are set out in the diagram below.



The rapid changes to the levels of ethnic and religious diversity in Thurrock would suggest that it has certainly been affected by the first of these seven factors: “Level and Pace of migration”. There are several other aspects including 6. ‘Personal, religious, cultural norms, values and attitudes’ that are directly relevant to religious education.

The academic Eric Kaufman writing about the 2008 BNP vote in the GLA elections makes a “distinction between *levels* and *changes* in diversity at the local level” Kaufman suggests that “The former dampens anti-immigration feeling while the latter elevates it.” This helps to explain why areas with larger non-white British minorities tend to experience fewer issues associated with tensions or even hostility to immigration. A recent article by the campaign company [here](#): presents this diagram created by C. Clarke IPTC Photo Metadata. Thurrock is mentioned in this article in the ‘newly diversifying’ category and therefore likely to be experiencing ‘major tensions and challenges’.



Almost one in five people in Thurrock recorded their ethnicity as non-White British in the 2011 census. The level of diversity has increased by over 10% in a decade. Our young population is becoming more diverse. Data from 2012 shows 26.5% of Thurrock school-aged children are from a black and minority ethnic group, compared with 19.1% of the total population. The religious make up of Thurrock is 63.3% Christian, 25.7% No religion, 2.0% Muslim, 0.8% Sikh, 0.7% Hindu, 0.4% Buddhist, 0.1% Jewish. 9,895 people did not state a religion. The change in the level of religious diversity in ten years is significant. See appendix B.



1.	Christian	63.30%
2.	No religion	25.70%
3.	Muslim	2.00%
4.	Sikh	0.80%
5.	Hindu	0.70%
6.	Buddhist	0.40%
7.	Jewish	0.10%
8.	Other	7.00%

The reduction of hate crime remains a priority in Thurrock. According to the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment [here](#), where Hate Crime offences due to religion were able to be broken down into religious type (in 85.7% of religious Hate Crime offences recorded), the highest amount of offences were against Muslim victims.

SACRE is aware that some schools in Thurrock have experienced these tensions directly. For example, parents have objected to the teaching of Islam and withdrawn children from lessons and visits to places of worship. The outcome for those children, who arguably are those that most need to be taught about Islam, are no longer being taught about it. It is not clear whether or not this is a widespread issue in Thurrock, but it is clear that SACRE needs to investigate. Schools have a statutory duty to promote community cohesion. (Education and Inspections Act 2006).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 SACRE members are invited to discuss the issues raised above and the role of religious education as one of the areas of the curriculum that might improve community cohesion/integration in Thurrock. This discussion will be informed by the text above and the article in appendix A by Dr Joyce Miller.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 SACRE advises the council on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions. The issue of community integration is not only a statutory duty for schools but a priority for the local community, therefore SACRE should advise on how religious education can play a part.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 SACRE advises the council on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions. The issue of community integration is not only a statutory duty for schools but a priority for the local community, therefore SACRE should advise on how religious education can play a part.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager Corporate Finance

Part funding for the conference has been agreed with the school improvement team of Thurrock Council.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

The legal duties on the advisory council are set out in s391 of the Education Act 1996. The main one is to advise the local authority on such matters connected with the religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools which do not have a religious character and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
(Community Development & Equalities Manager)

This report focuses on issues of community integration/ cohesion which is a strategic priority for Thurrock Council. The recommendations aim to help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

8.0 **Appendices to the report**

8.1 Appendix A – Religion, Education, Community and relations

8.2 Appendix B – The changing profile of Thurrock in relation to affiliation to religions and beliefs

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

Religion, Education, Community and relations: some reflections on the APPG inquiry

Process and product

This paper contains some reflections on the key themes of the report on religious education (RE) and good community relations commissioned by the All Party Parliamentary Group on RE (APPG). That report and the transcripts of the three oral-evidence sessions, held between December 2013 and February 2014, can be found at <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg>.

The document has a sub-heading: 'Cohesive schools - Cohesive communities - Cohesive society' (the titles that were given to the evidence sessions) and it is arranged under three headings:

- The Implementation of Law and Policy
- Learning in Religious Education
- Teaching Religious Education.

Each includes, in brief, the evidence that was received and the desired outcomes that can arise; it is not the purpose of this paper to explain the process or to reiterate either the evidence or the outcomes but rather to offer a commentary and reflection on RE and its contributions to good community relations, with some further questions to complement those set out at the end of the summary report.

These reflections are aimed primarily at fellow educationists with the aim of generating wider discussion on the range of issues that arose during the inquiry.

Introduction

Religious education and community relations have a great deal in common. They both have a range of names: RE used to be RI (Instruction) and then it was RK (Knowledge) and now it may be RS (Studies) or Theology or Religion, Philosophy and Ethics or part of combined humanities. 'Community relations' has been called community cohesion or social cohesion. These differences are not simply about semantics or current discourse: they reflect deeper meanings and emphases on the part of their users. Take, for example, the aims, purposes and content of religious education – the debate continues, as we have seen in recent responses to the RE Review. Similarly, community cohesion is a contested concept: seen by some as having a racialised agenda and by others as part of Prevent, it is sometimes differentiated from social cohesion by its lack of focus on social and income inequality.

A number of important commonalities exist between RE and community relations in the context of the education of children and young people. First, there are shared desired attitudes such as openness, empathy and courage (addressing difficult controversial issues requires courage on the part of both teachers and pupils). There is the development of skills common to both, including those required for interpretation, critical engagement, reflection and dialogue. There are also shared concepts, particularly identity and community and the plural versions of those terms. Affirming pupils' identities and working successfully with their local communities should be at the heart of schools' energies, for if these are not understood and affirmed how can real learning and nurture take place? By definition, this requires teachers and others to acquire a professional understanding of the key words used in the title of the APPG inquiry: religion, education, community and relations and this paper now sets out to explore each of them. It draws on the evidence given (both oral and written), on some of the relevant literature and makes links with other current initiatives.

Religion

A number of speakers drew attention to aspects of the term 'religion', a number of analyses were offered and questions were raised. Three ways of conceptualising religion were suggested:¹ propositional belief - religion is conceived as a set of propositions and to be religious is to subscribe to a set of propositional beliefs; tradition - religion is explained in terms of what people do, what it means to be religious in terms of everyday actions in the world; existential - where religion is about being, to be religious is to live with a kind of awareness, a kind of alertness. This typology raises questions for teachers of RE and others, including members of Agreed Syllabus Conferences:

- How far do you agree with this conceptualisation?
- If this way of conceptualising religion is helpful, how can it support RE?
- Is the RE that is taught in schools dominated by religion as propositional belief?
- Or is there an emphasis on existential questions?
- Or is the focus on religions as traditions?
- Is there a broad and balanced view of religion that underpins curriculum design in the subject?

There are further questions too:

- Is Britain a 'Christian country' as the Prime Minister would have it?²
- Or is it a post-Christian country, as a former Archbishop of Canterbury would have it?³
- How useful are the data about religion and belief from, for example, the census or the British Social attitudes surveys?

Religion and belief in society are in the process of rapid change and there are debates about secularity and religion:

- Is secularity opposite to religiosity?
- Are they different points on a changing continuum?
- Are they fluid and sometimes convergent ways of being?

¹ This came from Patricia Hannam's evidence. See:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014_01_27_tra.pdf

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27099700>

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/27/britain-post-christian-says-rowan-williams>

⁴ See, e.g., Spencer and Welden, 2012; and Woodhead and Catto, 2012

The evidence from recent research would suggest that our society is both religious and secular and individuals combine both in their own lives.⁴ Religion as a global phenomenon is different from religion in the western world: the decline in active membership of religious communities in the west is not reflected globally. Further, the religious groups that are thriving in the west are the charismatic and independent churches – mainly independent Pentecostal churches. What we believe has changed too: belief in a personal god has fallen but belief in a spirit or life force has doubled and so the relationship between religion and spirituality is also much disputed.⁵

Statistics about religious identity are dissected and argued over including, for example, the figures that were offered to the inquiry: the British Social Attitudes Survey of 2008 which showed that religion, for many citizens, is a – and sometimes the – salient feature of their identity:

- 33% said that religion is an important aspect of their life
- 61% said that religion is an important aspect of how they define themselves
- 90% who class themselves as Asian said that religion is important to them
- 93% of Muslims and 90% of Sikhs said that religion is an important part of their identity.

Given the many challenges that face RE teachers now, how can we expect 'religion as it is lived'⁶ in Britain and globally to be understood and taught by teachers? That will be difficult but how can RE fail to address the ever-changing, organic nature of the topic that is supposed to be at the heart of our subject?

Surprising evidence on this was presented to the inquiry.⁷ In a survey of 627 RE subject leaders it was found that learning about religions was rated as very important by only 27% of primary and 24% of secondary subject leaders. With regard to learning about a specific religion: only 33% of primary teachers and 28% of secondary teachers rated it important. In some respects these are extraordinary findings: teachers of RE who don't rate the teaching of religions as important! What then do they consider to be important? In primary schools a high priority is given to character formation and in secondary the focus is on ultimate questions and thinking critically about religion. A question for RE is whether these really have to be alternatives and how far agreed syllabuses support teachers in constructing their own schemes of work to create a balanced curriculum.

A further perspective was offered: the religion that features in RE classes is often religion as framed by the preoccupations of secular public discourses, such as fundamentalism, science versus religion, or religion and medical ethics. What is missing is religion as practised by individuals and communities - 'religiosity'. The survey also demonstrated that while young people are willing to respect religious identity, they do not show respect for religiosity: religious commitment and behaviour are often viewed as 'odd' and there is, it can be argued, a need to 'normalise' religious behaviour, without suppressing pupils' critical engagement with religions, beliefs and practices.

⁵ The information in this paragraph is from Prof Adam Dinham's evidence: See <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december-2013>

⁶ This is Prof Adam Dinham's phrase. ⁷

This was evidence given by Dr Julia Ipgrave: <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december-2013>

This is connected to worrying evidence about the link between religion and bullying in schools. In a 2012 survey, young people who agreed with the statement that at school 'I am bullied because of my religion' included 42% of Sikh pupils, 32% of Jewish pupils, 23% of Muslim pupils and 11% of Christian pupils. This was manifested in a number of ways, one of which was intolerance of religiosity. It was acceptable, for example to identify as a Christian as long as that didn't include attendance at church. The strong message that came across was: if you were religious it was better to keep it quiet in school, because you might get teased, treated differently or bullied.

There are whole-school strategies to deal with bullying but the inclusion of religion and belief as protected characteristics in the Public Sector Equality Duty means that RE teachers can play a specific role in challenging bullying, not least through raising their colleagues' knowledge and understanding of these areas. A linked issue was raised about intra-religious conflict and the responsibility schools have to try to address this specific question. It cannot be separated from religious bullying and discrimination nor from the use of the Internet and social media in negative ways such as spreading biased and ill-informed comment. (This is not to doubt, of course, that there are many benefits in their use.)

A further issue with regard to religion was raised in relation to the media with their prevailing view of religion as being characterised by anxiety: about moral absolutism (sex), abuse of power (children and women) and violence (9/11 and 7/7), and there is a need to consider this in relation to RE. Linked to this is the massive change in how young people access, use and share information. The use of the internet and social media raises specific issues for religious educators about the quality of information about religions and worldviews that are instantly available to students, often made more difficult by teachers' own lack of familiarity with such media. There was a call for a greater emphasis on media literacy for both teachers and their students with a focus on developing a deeper critical engagement with the information, its provenance and its intentions.⁷ An interesting example of work with young people was provided in which they were taught how to make their own conspiracy theory video which was then shown to their friends. The latter were convinced and had to be told that it was fabricated nonsense. Enabling a critical and discerning use of media is an important educational priority.

If teachers are to address these and other related questions, there is an urgent need for collaboration across the RE spectrum so that the work of academic researchers is made accessible to teachers, who then need additional training and support to enable them to deal with these complex and current issues in the classroom.

All of this links directly with the findings of the first APPG on RE inquiry on teacher supply and training (APPG, 2013) which quoted an Ofsted finding:

- One of the weakest aspects of RE was the provision of continuing professional development, which was inadequate in nearly four in 10 schools visited. It was good or better in only three in 10 schools (Ofsted 2010:25).

Acquiring knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews is already a considerable challenge for many teachers; awareness of their rapidly changing nature in a global context adds another layer of difficulty. The RE Council and its member organisations, the proposed new regional 'hubs' and the Expert Advisory Group for RE have a considerable

⁷ See the evidence presented by Jamie Bartlett:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

task on their hands to support teachers. **There is an urgent need for political support for initial and continuing professional training for teachers of RE.**

Education

'What is the purpose of education?' was a question put to the inquiry for consideration.⁸ There were three suggested answers:

First, an intellectual or qualification purpose, the area of education which is concerned to introduce the child to the intellectual history of human kind and which provides students with relevant qualifications. The numbers of students taking RE and RS examinations have increased exponentially in recent years and there is a body of knowledge that is contained within syllabuses and examination specifications. This purpose is one of the reasons that RE is funded by public money and it can be seen to make a significant impact on students' school results and therefore on their life opportunities. The inquiry received evidence that some groups of students can benefit especially from examination courses in RE/RS: in Hampshire, for example, a narrower attainment gap is observed for children in receipt of free school meals sitting GCSE RE when compared with some other subjects. At a school in Tower Hamlets it was found that the percentages of students from minority ethnic groups choosing RE as a GCSE option was higher than white students: around 68% for Black and Pakistani or Bangladeshi-heritage students compared to 55% of white students. Such evidence can be used to promote the role RE can play in enabling pupil's academic achievement.

The second purpose of education is nurture into the social and civic life of the nation and in relation to identity. Again, these are inseparable from the purpose of RE but the subject is not unique in this respect, rather it is complementary to other cognate subject areas, such as Citizenship and Personal Social and Health Education. As part of this nurturing of young people, a number of presenters emphasised the need for critical engagement with the material being studied. That will include challenging conformity, the content of public discourse and media representation of it. The debate about British Values is one example of this.

The third purpose of education – and one that is perhaps more disputed - is child-centred. This can only take place when there is a whole-school commitment to child-centred education, where the values of the school are developed, articulated and owned by the school community. This links closely to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and while this is an area inspected by Ofsted,⁹ there is evidence from elsewhere that there is much yet to be done if teachers are to understand how to fulfil this part of their professional duties.¹⁰

The importance of strong leadership was stressed by presenters, if schools are to fulfil their nurturing function towards pupils and the community. Pupils cannot be thought of as separate from their families and the ideal would be for mutually respectful collaboration between schools and their communities.

⁸ See the evidence of Patrician Hannam

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.01.27_tra.pdf

⁹ Though this applies only to schools and not to Further Education Colleges

¹⁰ See for example, http://www.thersa.org/___data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1540758/Schools-with-soul-REPORT.pdf

Religious Education

Drawing together now the first two terms to be examined, religion and education, questions are raised about religious education, particularly in relation to its purpose.

- What is RE for?
- How many purposes can it fulfil?
- What has religion to do with cohesion, or security, or diversity, and why should teaching about religion be concerned with such things?
- If we are trying to educate to bring about cohesion, why is it RE that should bear this burden?
- Don't other subjects such as maths and languages have an equal responsibility?
- What of the other aims and purposes of RE?

The purposes of RE were summarised by one of the evidence givers as: the development of skills in understanding and appraising religious beliefs; discerning the difference between valuable and harmful aspects of religions; appreciating the facets of religions without necessarily subscribing to them; and making reasonable accommodation between different and valid views and requirements. That includes understanding the pressures in every religion to maintain its heritage but also pressures to reinterpret that heritage as well as the pressures to engage in what opponents call extremism and fundamentalism – in every tradition.¹¹

The APPG inquiry identified a number of criteria that need to be met if RE is to be effective, not least in relation to community relations. Reference was made to breadth and balance in the curriculum; the need to increase teachers' knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews; an increase in religious literacy – language and concepts – for both teachers and pupils, to enable depth of understanding and informed engagement with religions and beliefs.

Religious literacy was a topic that a number of speakers emphasised, drawing attention to the gap that currently exists, not only in schools but in public discourse: there is a 'lamentable quality of conversation about religion, just when we need it more than ever'.¹² RE has not always engaged sufficiently with the socio-political dimensions of religions and beliefs, as Ofsted pointed out in its report in 2007.¹³ This is a huge challenge for RE and it is not only attitudinal. We should not underestimate the cognitive and linguistic challenges the study of religion poses to young people with little or no experience of religions; to them RE often appears too complicated, foreign or just 'weird'. It was claimed in evidence that RE that helps to bridge the religious literacy gap is the RE that makes religion exciting and that normalises it.¹⁴

The vast majority of respondents made a strong link between schools teaching about different religions and peaceful coexistence between those religions. RE lessons can provide a safe space for discussing potentially contentious religious topics. This was exemplified

¹¹ See Robin Richardson's evidence:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

¹² Prof Dinham quoting Grace Davie (1994)

¹³ See Making Sense of Religion (2007,7)

¹⁴ See Dr Julia Ipgrave's evidence: <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10december-2013>

through evidence about the *REsilience* project which had been initiated through the previous government to provide mentor support to teachers to develop confidence and competence. The inquiry was reminded of words of the Toledo Guiding Principles: Those who teach about religions and beliefs ... need to have the knowledge, attitude and skills to teach about religions and beliefs in a fair and balanced way ... so that they can ... help students interact with each other in sensitive and respectful ways.¹⁵

There is also the question of the changing nature of religion and belief and how RE can respond to this challenge: 'The real religious landscape and the one imagined by policy and theory have a huge gap between them'.¹⁶ This will require work on the part of curriculum and syllabus developers, resource producers, professional development providers, senior managers and subject specialists, as well as collaboration across the RE spectrum so that knowledge and understanding can be shared to everyone's benefit.

Community

The four definitions of 'community' used by Ofsted were considered: the school community, the community within which the school is located, the UK community and the global community.¹⁹ The concept of community/ies though can – should - also be understood in relation to individuals and the communities to which they belong: ethnic, religious, linguistic, national, regional, local as well as sporting, leisure and other *ad hoc* communities. Each of these links to identity/ies and to questions that need to be explored as young people and their teachers work together, learning about themselves as well as about the world in which we all live.

The concept of community cannot be separated from the concept of society and one of our evidence givers reminded us that in British law there is a requirement not only to promote the spiritual, moral and social development of children but also **of society**.¹⁷ This leads to a fundamental question which is highly relevant for everyone involved in decision making in education: What kind of society do we want? One of our speakers summed up her vision:

There is joy in celebrating our common humanity: by being alongside one another in things that matter to my friends, neighbours and strangers; by struggling together against racism, oppression, poverty, social injustice, fear, ignorance and anything that degrades human beings.¹⁸

There are at least two questions that arise from this. First, there is the issue of schools with a religious character, and their role in promoting good community relations. When issues such as extremism and social segregation are discussed, faith schools are frequently cited as part of the problem. Are they part of the solution? Two of our speakers defended the role of faith communities in education. There is the argument that the faith community as a whole is directly involved financially and in governance, determining the ethos of the school and the

¹⁵ This was quoted by Lesley Prior:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

¹⁶ Prof Adam Dinham: <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december2013> 19

This was included in Deborah Weston's evidence (ibid)

¹⁷ This reminder was given by Dr Marius Felderhof

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.01.27_tra.pdf

¹⁸ This was stated by Aliya Azam (ibid)

nature and character of the RE syllabus. This active involvement ensures that faith schools are never isolated from but responsive to local needs, expectations and ambitions.¹⁹ With specific reference to Church of England voluntary aided schools, we heard that there is a duty for them to serve their local community: the rich and poor, the more and less able, the more and less 'religious', the Christian and non-Christian.²⁰

There is a second question about identity and community: how we preserve what is important to people about their identity as members of a religious minority while they are joining and adapting to the wider majority community.²¹ A related question is the obverse of this: how can the 'silent majority' of young people who are not actively religious relate to the more easily identified and acknowledged religious and ethnic minorities? This is a question for all schools to explore as they serve their community/ies and as they attempt to articulate what it means in their own situation. Such conversations will include the exploration of the values that lie at the heart of the school, its life and its ethos and it is a conversation in which pupils, parents and the wider community will also be involved. One of the most inspiring aspects of the inquiry as a whole was the contributions made by two groups of Young Ambassadors whose vision of and commitment to good community relations and RE's role in promoting was truly impressive. Listening to all pupils, not just Young Ambassadors, is essential.

Relations

The phrase 'good community relations' is included in the title of this inquiry but what is not entirely clear is whether 'community relations' is synonymous with 'community cohesion', whether 'community cohesion' is the same as 'social cohesion', whether 'cohesion' and 'integration' mean the same and what, if any, is the significance of nomenclature.

Educationists know that the duty to promote community cohesion remains on the statute book even though Ofsted no longer inspects how far schools meet that duty. Speakers offered some insight into this complex area. First, mention was made of Robert Putnam's work and the need for 'bonding' within communities so that they have internal strength and 'bridging' across communities to prevent in-group loyalty from becoming out-group antagonism.²² And we were reminded that we cannot undermine the importance of group mentality and solidarity, not least for followers of religious and belief groups.²³ A number of people gave evidence on the importance of linking and dialogue between groups and the ways in which understanding and community relations can thereby be improved, and not only for pupils. Encounter is no less crucial for teachers because it is hard for them to model the qualities of intercultural understanding with their pupils if they lack the opportunities for learning from encounter with difference.²⁷

¹⁹ Dr Marius Felderhof's evidence (see above, note 19)

²⁰ This was in Jane Chipperton's evidence, quoting Prof David Ford:

<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december-2013>

²¹ Aliya Azam asked this question

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.01.27_tra.pdf

²² These were the words of Dr Norman Richardson:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

²³ Jamie Bartlett's evidence:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24__t.pdf 27

Evidence from Dr Norman Richardson (ibid)

Community Relations

It is too easy to assume that encounter between groups will automatically lead to tolerance. The experiences of Northern Ireland and in English towns along 'the M62 corridor', such as Bradford and Oldham, may suggest otherwise. It was disturbing to learn that the education community and the

Department for Education have been non-compliant with regard to duties set out in the Equality Act (2010).²⁴ At the time of writing, Ofsted does not check compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and, as we know, they have been told not to inspect schools' compliance with the duty to promote community cohesion. In the wake of the 'Trojan Horse' furore, it is perhaps time to suggest that such decisions might be re-examined.

Whether or not Islamophobia was an issue in the Trojan Horse affair, it is a major problem in our society in relation to equality and to community cohesion and it presents particular problems in RE. It cannot be ignored in the teaching of Islam nor can it be assumed that simply learning about Islam will be of any benefit.

There is a naïve and simplifying view that the solution to Islamophobia, Muslim hostility or religion is to teach people about Islam.²⁵ And, in reference to the English Defence League, we were told that they would claim not to be

Islamophobia because phobias are irrational whereas they claim to possess evidence from the Internet and other sources that demonstrate that their fear is anything but irrational. How can RE teachers respond to these challenges? How can schools work more effectively with their communities? With parents?

There are some who remind us that RE isn't just or mainly about community relations and there is truth in that but there are areas of the RE curriculum where stereotypical attitudes and prejudices will prevent open-ended, open-minded engagement with what is being studied. That is not to say that young people will not be critical of or disagree with what they are learning but the learning process should not be hampered by pre-existing biases. These have to be addressed and this may be an uncomfortable and challenging process for teachers.

What this means is that RE is in a unique position because some of the key questions about community relations are intrinsic to the content of our subject. It does not mean that we have to bear the whole burden of challenging misconceptions and misinformation: the whole school has the responsibility to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Promoting good community relations and developing SMSC are inseparable and RE is one of the junctures when they naturally combine. Why would RE teachers (or any teacher) **not** wish to promote better community relations?

Final thoughts

It has become commonplace to talk of 'multiple identities' and there is a considerable literature available on this. It is possible to see each aspect of identity related to a

²⁴ Evidence from Robin Richardson (ibid)

²⁵ [Robin Richardson](#),
Ibid

community: each of us has many facets and many groups with which we identify. Nonetheless, to see others and ourselves as simply the sum of the labels that are applicable to us is to be guilty of a reductionism: we are more than this. And this is where religious education can move discussion of identity and community to a deeper level. Identity is an existential concept and by exploring it with children and young people, we can open them up to the uniqueness (and for some, the sanctity) of human beings. This is something that religions and worldviews address in their analysis of and solutions to existential questions and so RE can take rather mundane notions of identity and move them in two directions: a deeper understanding and a more spiritual view of what it is to be human.

RE's contribution to community relations is not just about our subject content or the skills that we help develop: it is in dealing with the existential questions to which religions and worldviews offer the answers that we can really develop young people as skilled intercultural navigators and champions of equalities, human rights and social justice.

There is also a sense in which it could be argued that RE also has 'multiple identities': there are many disciplines within our area of study and many facets to our work, we have varying and sometimes competing our aims and purposes, we have a range of content and skills and different values we work towards, we have different communities and interest groups and a wider range of schools than ever before. There is room for all of us with our differing priorities.

It may be that this metaphor is one that would be useful in promoting cohesion within difference in the world of RE as a whole.

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Miller
2014.**

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Appendix B

The changing profile of Thurrock in relation to affiliation to religions and beliefs

Table one sets out the results of the census in 2001 and 2011 comparing the percentage of the population in terms of their answer to the question about their religion or belief

Table 1

Faith in Thurrock	Thurrock 2001 Census	Thurrock 2011 census	UK 2001	UK 2011
Christian	75.09%	63.30%	71.10%	59.30%
Buddhist	0.17%	0.40%	0.30%	0.40%
Hindu	0.55%	0.70%	1.10%	1.50%
Jewish	0.17%	0.10%	0.50%	0.50%
Muslim	1.07%	2.00%	3.00%	4.80%
Sikh	0.70%	0.80%	0.60%	0.80%
Other	0.21%	0.30%	0.30%	0.40%
No religion	15.51%	26.00%	14.80%	25.10%
Religion not stated	6.52%	6.30%	7.70%	7.20%

Green= greater than the national average Yellow=reflects national average Blue-smaller than the national average