

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 16 June 2021 | | ITEM: 7 |
| Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education | | |
| GCSE entries and results in Thurrock 2020 | | |
| 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: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

SACRE monitors provision for Religious Education in its local area where RE is delivered in accordance with the local Agreed Syllabus. This is part of the statutory duties of a SACRE. Thurrock introduced a new Agreed Syllabus in 2016 and regularly monitors data on provision for the subject to establish how effective the new syllabus has been in meeting its aim to raise standards of RE.

Thurrock appears in position 49 out of 150 local authorities when ranked according to entries for GCSE RS. The highest ranked authority enters 77% and the lowest 11%. The average point score for all subjects in Thurrock Schools is around 2 points (half a GCSE grade) lower than the national average. This finding is consistent with the national trend in that in LAs entering higher proportions of candidates for GCSE RS pupils tend to perform better overall than in lower entering local authorities.

This report compares GCSE entries and results for Religious Studies with national data and explores the extent to which the trends for schools in Thurrock reflects those nationally.

1. Recommendation(s):

That SACRE:

- **Informs school leaders, multi-academy trusts and governors about the findings of this research and**
- **Requests that they consider how the study of Religious Education as part of a broad and balanced curriculum appears to have an impact on pupil attainment overall.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 *From DfE website: "Public Examinations in England were cancelled for the summer of 2020 and pupils were instead awarded centre assessed grade. An analysis of the data shows that pupil level attainment statistics increased - more than would be expected in a typical year - between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. This almost certainly reflects the change to the way GCSE grades were awarded rather than improvements in pupil performance. As a result, the 2019/20 data cannot be considered comparable to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance."*
- 2.2 For this reason, the Secretary of State for Education made a commitment not to publish school level data for the summer 2020 season, however, local authority level data is available which is the focus of this report. In table 1 and 2 below, Local Authorities are ranked according to the percentage of pupils who were entered for GCSE RS Full course in 2020 and the commentary that follows, presents an analysis of the characteristics of the highest and lowest 20 of 150 local authorities.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Thurrock requires that all schools that adopt this syllabus follow a national accredited course throughout key stage 4. In the past, the short course was a popular means of meeting this requirement, especially because the teaching time was only one hour a week. Since 2014 however, entries for RS short course have declined rapidly, almost certainly because this qualification was removed from the list of those that count towards performance tables.
- 3.2 The impact on RE in Thurrock and elsewhere, was that schools following the short course, could either:
- Attempt to deliver a full course on short course time;
 - Make changes to the timetable so that a full course could be delivered in years 10-11
 - Begin GCSE in year 9 and deliver it over three years instead of two
 - Begin GCSE in year 9 and deliver it over two years, entering early at the end of year 10
 - Make GCSE RS an optional GCSE with the remaining pupils not following the Agreed Syllabus requirements
 - Replace Agreed Syllabus provision with a minimal level of provision via tutorials, combined sessions with PSHEe / Citizenship etc.

Perhaps inevitably, the result of this change in government policy has been that fewer children in Thurrock and elsewhere are now receiving their

entitlement to a comprehensive religious education. National data¹ also shows that provision in Academy Schools is a significant concern with around 50% reporting no timetable provision for year 11 at all. In schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies, the figure is 38.5%.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 SACRE has advised the local authority about its concerns but for a number of reasons, there has been very little change. This report suggests that it may be possible to change the narrative with non-compliant schools in a way that might have an impact. Rather than arguing for more provision for RE on the basis of statutory / contractual requirements, this report suggests the case is made for RE as part of an independent broad and balanced curriculum. The data presents appear to suggest that where schools do not provide adequate RE provision, the trend is weaker attainment in all the main performance indicators and a particularly negative impact on pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

5.1 Not applicable

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

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance, Corporate Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the actions recommended in this report, if approved will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

¹ <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/NATRE%20SWF%20report%20-data%20pub%202020%20.pdf>

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

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.

This report asks that SACRE considers the attached research and informs school leaders of the findings in order that they can make an informed decision about provision for RE.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

The aim of this report is to address SACRE concerns about pupils in Thurrock who are not currently receiving their entitlement to Religious Education. Higher standards in the teaching of RE will 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. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 - GCSE Religious Studies in 2020

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

GCSE Religious Studies in 2020

How might entry rates for GCSE RS impact on pupil performance across the curriculum?

Pupils in LAs with the highest rate of entry for GCSE Religious Studies perform the equivalent of one and a half grades higher on average than those in LAs with the lowest rates of entry.

Context: From DfE website: *"Public Examinations in England were cancelled for the summer of 2020 and pupils were instead awarded centre assessed grade. An analysis of the data shows that pupil level attainment statistics increased - more than would be expected in a typical year - between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. This almost certainly reflects the change to the way GCSE grades were awarded rather than improvements in pupil performance. As a result, the 2019/20 data cannot be considered comparable to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance."*

For this reason, the Secretary of State for Education made a commitment not to publish school level data for the summer 2020 season, however, local authority level data is available which is the focus of this report. In table 1 and 2 below, Local Authorities are ranked according to the percentage of pupils who were entered for GCSE RS Full course in 2020 and the commentary that follows, presents an analysis of the characteristics of the highest and lowest 20 of 150 local authorities.

It is striking that the proportion of the Year 11 cohort entered for GCSE RS in 200 varies from 11% to 77%. Some of this variation can be explained by the fact that in the authorities with the top rates of entry, the proportion of pupils being educated in schools with a religious character is greater, but at only 7 percentage points above the national average, this factor can only be a small element of the explanation.

What do we know about the 20 local authorities that recorded the highest levels of entry for RS GCSE?

The average:

1. number of students from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds in these local authorities is **18 percentage points above** the national average,
2. number of children in the authority being educated in a school with a religious character is **7 percentage points above** the national average,
3. entry of pupils in schools in these local authorities for GCSE RS is **40 percentage points higher** than the national average,
4. attainment of grades 9-4 in RS is **2 percentage points above** the national average,
5. attainment 8 score is **2 points above** the national average,
6. point score (APS) for EBacc subjects is **0.20 points above** the national average,
7. number of pupils entered for the EBacc in these local authorities is **7 percentage points higher** than the national average,
8. number of pupils that attained grades 9-4 for the English Baccalaureate is **6 percentage points above** the national average,
9. number of pupils entitled to claim free school meals is **0.8% percentage points lower** than the national average,
- 10 - 8 of the Local Authorities in the top 20 were London Boroughs

| | Number of secondary schools | % pupils in non-selective schools | % White British | % BAME | % pupils educated in schools with a religious character | % achieving 9-4 Full course RS (of those entered) | Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils | Average EBacc APS score per pupil | Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate | % of pupils achieving 9-4 in English Baccalaureate | Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 | % known to be eligible for Free School Meals | % entering Full course |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|------------------------|
| 1 | 23 | 87% | 5% | 95% | 10% | 85% | 53.1 | 4.8 | 65% | 41.0% | 4,079 | 22% | 77% |
| 2 | 9 | 100% | 30% | 70% | 36% | 85% | 53.1 | 4.8 | 50% | 40.8% | 1,555 | 18% | 75% |
| 3 | 13 | 77% | 25% | 75% | 52% | 90% | 56.1 | 5.2 | 67% | 52.1% | 1,458 | 20% | 74% |
| 4 | 13 | 92% | 9% | 91% | 15% | 80% | 53.4 | 4.9 | 65% | 46.1% | 2,334 | 14% | 74% |
| 5 | 6 | 100% | 20% | 80% | 56% | 89% | 58.0 | 5.1 | 43% | 35.7% | 899 | 23% | 71% |
| 6 | 15 | 53% | 14% | 86% | 26% | 83% | 55.9 | 4.9 | 47% | 36.5% | 1,958 | 11% | 69% |
| 7 | 16 | 94% | 14% | 86% | 24% | 83% | 53.5 | 4.9 | 56% | 44.1% | 3,043 | 17% | 68% |
| 8 | 20 | 90% | 9% | 91% | 17% | 83% | 50.1 | 4.5 | 54% | 36.3% | 3,082 | 37% | 68% |
| 9 | 18 | 100% | 90% | 10% | 34% | 69% | 47.6 | 4.1 | 35% | 27.0% | 2,945 | 17% | 63% |
| 10 | 9 | 100% | 86% | 14% | 38% | 76% | 54.0 | 4.8 | 46% | 35.0% | 1,755 | 9% | 63% |
| 11 | 15 | 93% | 9% | 91% | 24% | 88% | 53.1 | 4.9 | 66% | 46.9% | 3,078 | 14% | 62% |
| 12 | 39 | 87% | 91% | 9% | 20% | 73% | 50.0 | 4.3 | 30% | 23.0% | 5,109 | 11% | 62% |
| 13 | 13 | 77% | 87% | 13% | 38% | 78% | 48.6 | 4.2 | 33% | 23.6% | 2,032 | 19% | 60% |
| 14 | 10 | 90% | 81% | 19% | 0% | 77% | 51.9 | 4.6 | 52% | 37.9% | 1,856 | 8% | 60% |
| 15 | 15 | 53% | 53% | 47% | 8% | 70% | 48.7 | 4.2 | 34% | 23.5% | 1,943 | 13% | 59% |
| 16 | 20 | 85% | 25% | 75% | 19% | 75% | 46.2 | 4.0 | 34% | 23.2% | 3,898 | 19% | 58% |
| 17 | 10 | 100% | 64% | 36% | 14% | 85% | 55.9 | 5.0 | 53% | 43.2% | 1,675 | 7% | 58% |
| 18 | 9 | 100% | 90% | 10% | 41% | 77% | 45.9 | 3.9 | 25% | 20.3% | 1,639 | 22% | 58% |
| 19 | 20 | 85% | 58% | 42% | 51% | 74% | 48.3 | 4.2 | 34% | 26.6% | 3,549 | 20% | 57% |
| 20 | 11 | 73% | 43% | 57% | 18% | 86% | 58.9 | 5.5 | 64% | 52.2% | 1,767 | 8% | 56% |
| Highest Group Average | | 87% | 45% | 55% | 27% | 80% | 52.00 | 4.6 | 47% | 36% | 2,483 | 16.5% | 65% |
| National Average | | 83% | 63% | 37% | 20% | 78% | 50.00 | 4.40 | 40% | 30% | 3,772 | 17.3% | 39% |

Table 1

What do we know about the 20 local authorities that recorded the lowest levels of entry for RS GCSE?

The average:

1. number of students from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds in these local authorities is **16 percentage points below** the national average,
2. number of children in the authority being educated in a school with a religious character is **8 percentage points below** the national average,
3. entry of pupils in schools in these local authorities for GCSE RS is **20% below** than the national average,
4. attainment of grades 9-4 in RS is **0.1 percentage points below** the national average,
5. attainment 8 score is **1.2 points below** the national average,
6. point score (APS) for EBacc subjects is **0.19 points below** the national average,
7. number of pupils entered for the EBacc in these local authorities is **6 percentage points below** than the national average,
8. number of pupils that attained grades 9-4 for the English Baccalaureate is **4 percentage points below** the national average,
9. number of pupils entitled to claim free school meals is **0.2 percentage points below** the national average,

Also -

10. 0 of the Local Authorities in the bottom 20 were London Boroughs.

Local authority entry rates for GCSE Religious Studies as a proportion of the Year 11 cohort in 2020 – lowest 20

| Rank | Number of secondary schools | % pupils in non-selective schools | % White British | % BAME | % pupils educated in schools with a religious character | % achieving 9-4 Full course RS (of those entered) | Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils | Average EBacc APS score per pupil | Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate | % of pupils achieving 9-4 in English Baccalaureate | Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 | % known to be eligible for Free School Meals | % entering Full course Religious Studies |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | 14 | 93% | 80% | 20% | 21% | 79% | 51.3 | 4.49 | 42% | 32.5% | 2,808 | 15% | 23% |
| 2 | 13 | 77% | 75% | 25% | 6% | 75% | 49.9 | 4.36 | 37% | 28.7% | 2,051 | 16% | 22% |
| 3 | 43 | 86% | 91% | 10% | 10% | 78% | 50.2 | 4.37 | 36% | 25.9% | 6,895 | 12% | 21% |
| 4 | 14 | 86% | 48% | 52% | 12% | 82% | 46.3 | 3.95 | 30% | 21.1% | 2,549 | 16% | 20% |
| 5 | 45 | 93% | 83% | 17% | 15% | 77% | 50.5 | 4.42 | 38% | 29.0% | 8,094 | 14% | 20% |
| 6 | 32 | 84% | 94% | 6% | 8% | 81% | 48.8 | 4.10 | 32% | 25.7% | 5,017 | 20% | 20% |
| 7 | 32 | 91% | 90% | 10% | 0% | 72% | 48.8 | 4.11 | 25% | 18.6% | 5,233 | 14% | 19% |
| 8 | 42 | 93% | 71% | 30% | 13% | 77% | 48.5 | 4.20 | 36% | 26.9% | 7,773 | 11% | 19% |
| 9 | 11 | 73% | 94% | 6% | 15% | 71% | 48.0 | 4.10 | 29% | 25.3% | 1,600 | 21% | 19% |
| 10 | 16 | 69% | 90% | 10% | 12% | 74% | 49.2 | 4.25 | 33% | 24.5% | 1,945 | 16% | 19% |
| 11 | 20 | 90% | 41% | 59% | 18% | 80% | 46.1 | 3.83 | 28% | 18.9% | 3,773 | 24% | 18% |
| 12 | 28 | 50% | 80% | 20% | 16% | 73% | 48.3 | 4.16 | 31% | 21.3% | 2,732 | 9% | 18% |
| 13 | 48 | 90% | 81% | 19% | 9% | 84% | 48.4 | 4.18 | 33% | 23.5% | 7,413 | 13% | 18% |
| 14 | 29 | 59% | 91% | 9% | 20% | 77% | 49.7 | 4.34 | 43% | 29.1% | 3,559 | 15% | 18% |
| 15 | 11 | 82% | 73% | 27% | 18% | 86% | 45.7 | 3.95 | 38% | 24.3% | 1,839 | 22% | 18% |
| 16 | 47 | 81% | 80% | 20% | 15% | 80% | 50.1 | 4.38 | 38% | 28.1% | 7,413 | 10% | 18% |
| 17 | 28 | 82% | 58% | 42% | 7% | 77% | 48.6 | 4.25 | 38% | 27.0% | 4,963 | 23% | 17% |
| 18 | 20 | 80% | 83% | 17% | 16% | 77% | 48.8 | 4.18 | 33% | 24.0% | 3,715 | 16% | 17% |
| 19 | 4 | 75% | 90% | 10% | 0% | 84% | 55.3 | 4.89 | 41% | 35.0% | 497 | 7% | 15% |
| 20 | 10 | 100% | 90% | 10% | 0% | 76% | 43.2 | 3.74 | 30% | 22.3% | 1,742 | 20% | 11% |
| Group Average | | 81.6% | 79.1% | 20.9% | 11.5% | 78.0% | 48.79 | 4.21 | 34.6% | 25.6% | 4080.55 | 15.7% | 18.5% |
| National Average | | 82.9% | 63.5% | 36.5% | 19.5% | 78.1% | 50.0 | 4.4 | 40.2% | 30.0% | 3771.65 | 17.3% | 38.9% |

Table 2

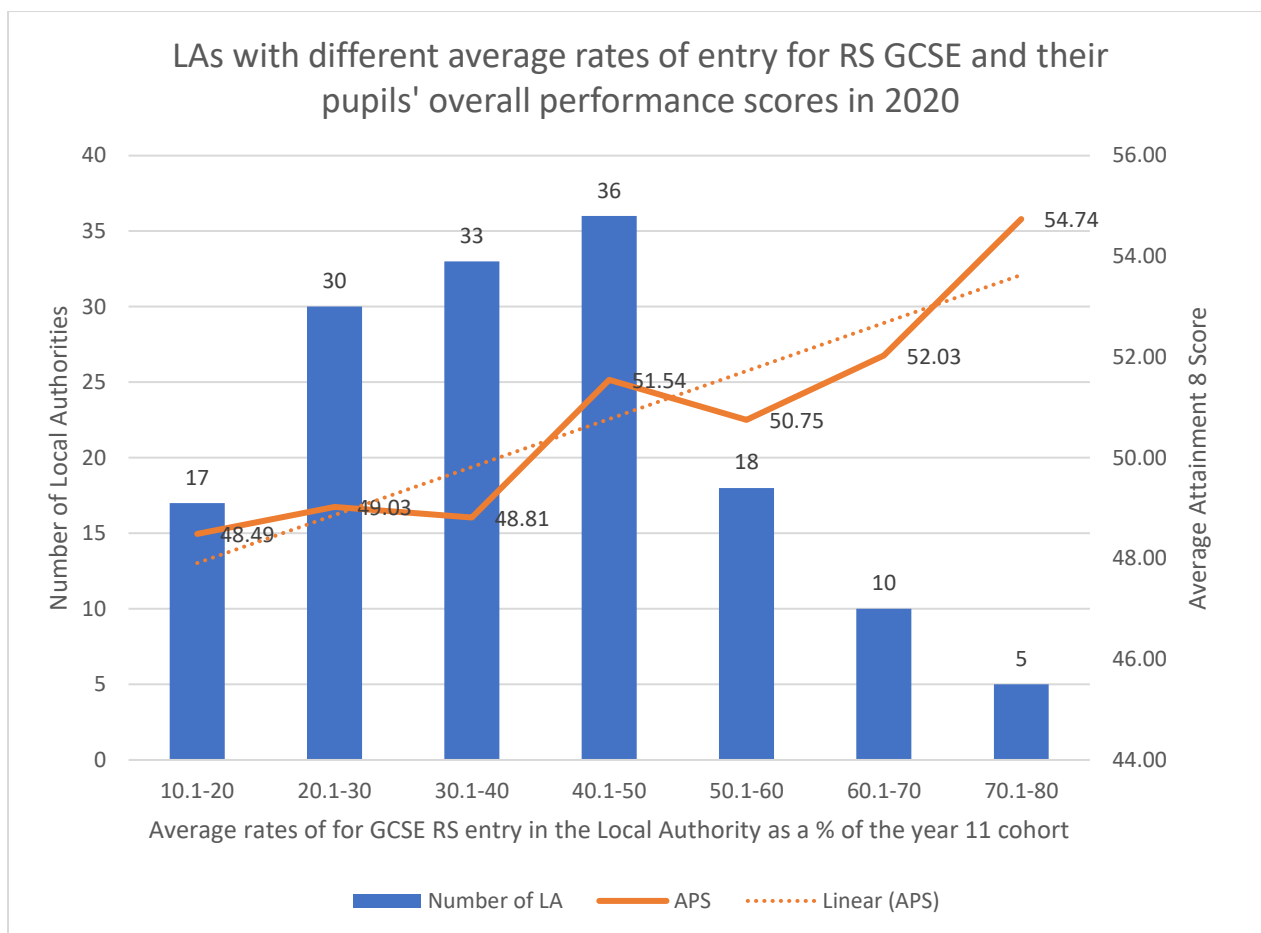


Figure 1

| Rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies 2020 | Number of pupils at end of Key Stage 4 | Number of LAs |
|--|--|---------------|
| 10.1-20% | 69,857 | 17 |
| 20.1-30% | 132,260 | 30 |
| 30.1-40% | 133,977 | 33 |
| 40.1-50% | 125,890 | 36 |
| 50.1-60% | 68,697 | 18 |
| 60.1-70% | 20,970 | 10 |
| 70.1-80% | 10,325 | 5 |

The trend line in figure 1 (dotted red) shows that in Local Authorities with the highest rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies, the average points score for all pupils is just over 6 points higher than in those LAs with the lowest rates of entry. 6 points is the equivalent of one and a half standard pass grades across 8 subjects with English and Mathematics double weighted.

Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications including mathematics (double weighted) and English (double weighted), 3 further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure and 3 further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DfE approved list. Each individual grade a pupil achieves is assigned a point score, which is then used to calculate a pupil's Attainment 8 score.

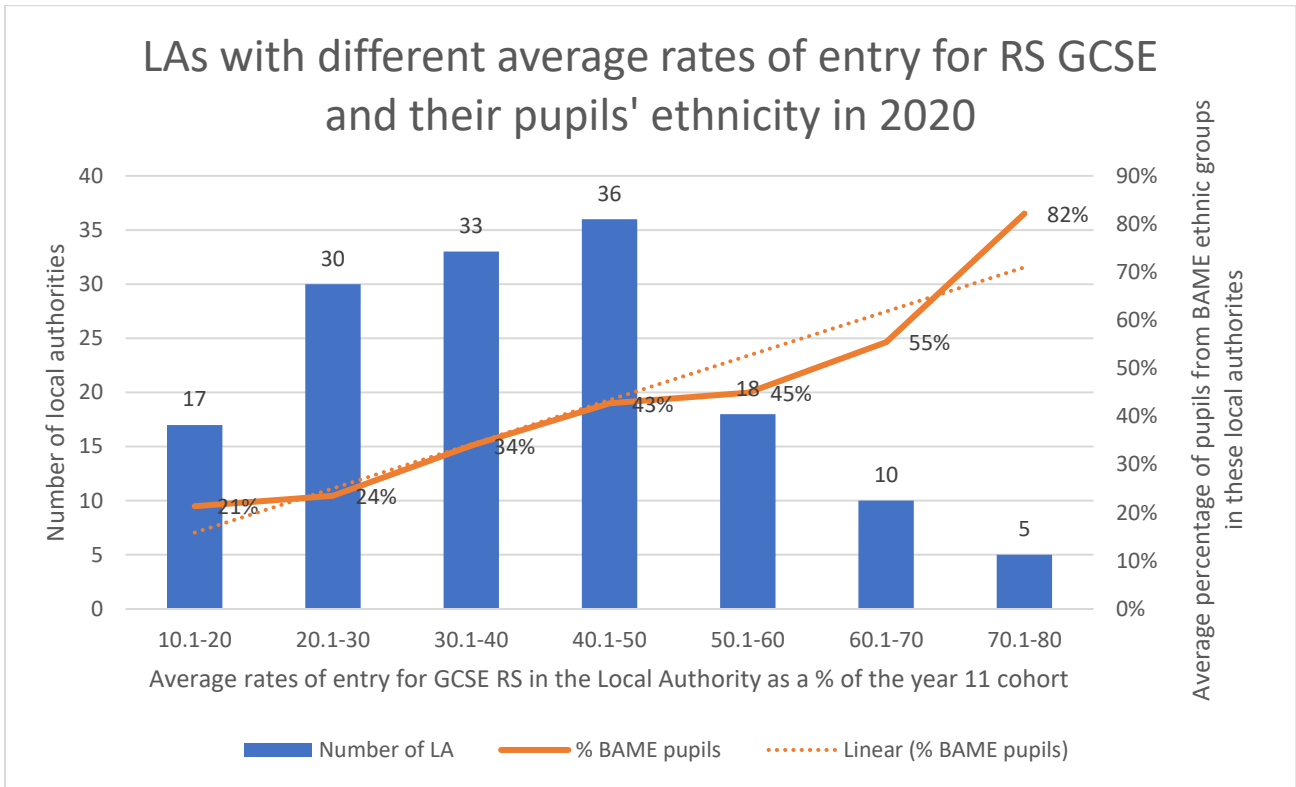
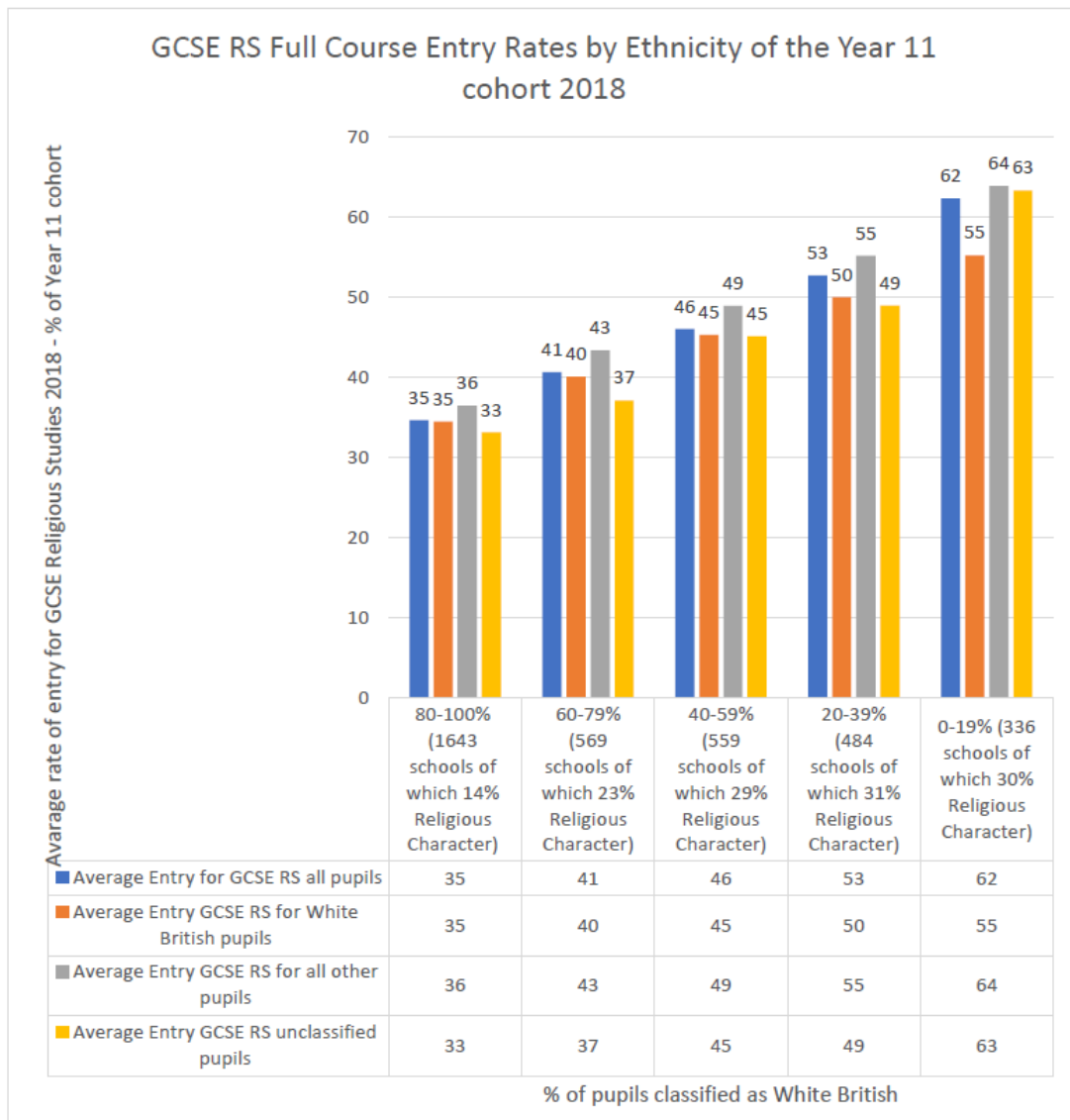


Figure 2

The trend line in figure 2 (dotted red) shows that in Local Authorities with the highest rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies, serve populations with a greater proportion of pupils from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.



This data shows that pupils in schools where the majority come from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, are twice as likely to be entered for GCSE RS. The table below that these pupils perform on average, about 9 percentage points higher at GCSE RS than their White British Peers. The cumulative finding from these data sets is that where children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are in a school where they are a minority, they are twice as likely not to be entered for GCSE RS and yet, this subject is one that they are more likely to perform well.

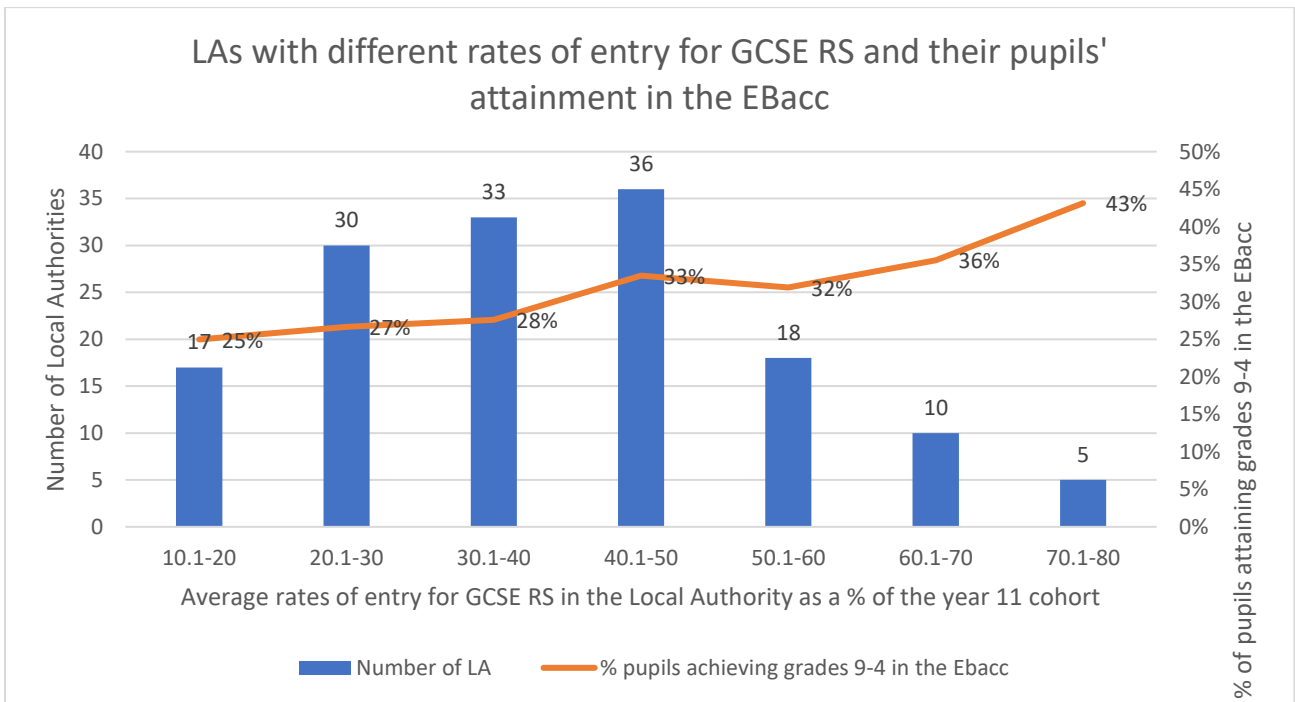
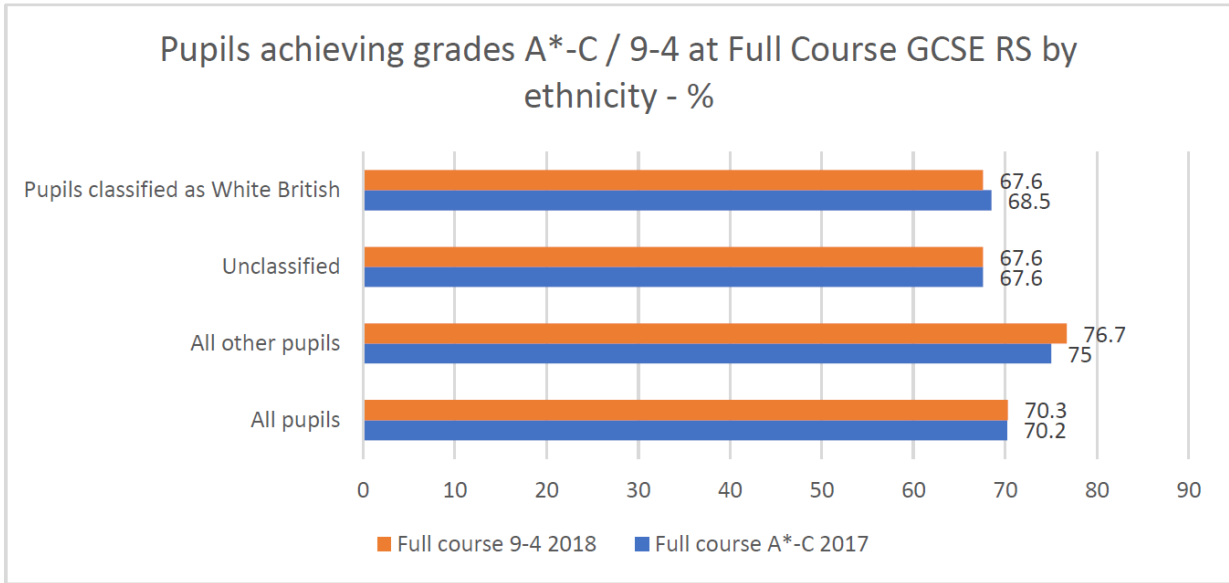


Figure 3

The trend line in figure 3 (dotted red) shows that in Local Authorities with the highest rates of entry for GCSE Religious Studies, the number of pupils attaining grades 9-4 in the EBacc is 18 percentage points higher than in those LAs with the lowest rates of entry.

How does the data in Thurrock compare to the national trends?

Thurrock appears in position 49 out of 150 local authorities when ranked according to entries for GCSE RS. The highest ranked authority enters 77% and the lowest 11%. The entry rate in Thurrock is 25% compared to an average in England of 39%. The average point score for all subjects in Thurrock Schools is around 2 points (half a GCSE grade) lower than average. This is consistent with the national trend for this data in that in LAs entering higher proportions of candidates for GCSE RS pupils tend to perform better overall than in lower entering local authorities. The difference between the top and the bottom ranked LAs in relation to entries

for GCSE RS is 6 APS scores i.e. One and a half GCSE grades. Of course this is a correlation and would need more research to prove causation, but it is worth considering how the knowledge, understanding and skills in RS might be complementary for performance in other subjects e.g. English literature, English language, History, Art and Music.

| LA ranking | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|----------|-----------------------------------|-------|--|------------------------|---------------|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|---|-------------------------------|
| 49 | Thurrock | Number of secondary schools 11 | 0.12% | % pupils in non-selective schools 82% | % White British 57% | % BAME 43% | % pupils educated in schools with a religious character 6% | % achieving 9-4 Full course (of those entered) 74% | Average Attainment 8 score of all pupils 48.6 | Average EBacc APS score per pupil 4.19 | Percentage number of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate 39% | Percentage number of pupils achieving 9-4 the English Baccalaureate 28.9% | Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 1,864 | % known to be eligible for Free School Meals 15% | % entering Full course 25% |
| | England | | | 83% | 63% | 37% | 20% | 78% | 50.10 | 4.4 | 40% | 30% | 3,772 | 17% | 39% |

