

<b>16 June 2021</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education</b>		
<b>Ofsted Research Review on Religious Education 2021</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## Executive Summary

1. A revised Ofsted framework and handbook was published in 2019, that placed far more emphasis on curriculum design.
2. In May 2021, Ofsted published a research review on RE as part of a series on different subjects. Religious Education was the second report to be published.

### 1. Recommendation(s):

- 1.1 **That SACRE members agree to share information about the key findings of this review with Headteachers, Governors and multi-academy trusts and some excerpts to stimulate discussion.**

### 2. Introduction and Background:

The new education inspection framework from Ofsted was published 14th May 2019 along with the inspection handbook. This report highlights Ofsted's findings from a research review into what constitutes high quality RE in the context of that framework.

### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Headteachers and Governing Bodies/Boards are responsible for the educational standards and provision in their schools. The work forms a key part of the judgement of leadership and management in Ofsted reports. This report recommends that SACRE share the report and discussion resources of

Ofsted's research review to ensure those in leadership roles are informed of the findings.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Ofsted are paying more careful attention to the curriculum and this has already led to many schools undertaking a review of the curriculum. This presents an opportunity for SACRE to encourage schools, especially those where RE has not previously been a priority to reconsider their position

#### **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 second 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 activities recommended in this report will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work.

##### **7.2 Legal**

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

This report asks that SACRE accepts a recommendation for action that comes within the remit of its monitoring function.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The aim of this exercise is to help school leaders and governors become better informed about the provision for RE in their schools. If governors hold senior leaders to account for the level and standards of provision in RE, it is likely to help raise standards. 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. Furthermore, several comments on RE in the research review are linked to the duty of all schools to promote the fundamental British Values including mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.

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

- Not applicable

## 8. Appendices to the Report

- Appendix 1 - A summary of the Ofsted research review on religious education published by the DfE on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2021
- Appendix 2 - Extracts from the report for discussion with teachers and school leaders

### Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE



### **A summary of the Ofsted research review on religious education published by the DfE on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2021**

Ofsted has published the second in a series of reviews into different subjects across the curriculum. This review looks at religious education (RE).

The latest review draws on our education inspection framework (EIF) and other religious education (RE) literature to identify what contributes to high-quality RE curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and systems in schools where we inspect RE.

The review recognises that there is no single way of constructing and teaching a high-quality RE curriculum. However, it does identify some common features:

- The curriculum should cover substantive content and concepts collectively (or ‘collectively enough’), rather than covering excessive amounts of content superficially. Content is sufficient for pupils to grasp a bigger picture about the place of religion and non-religion in the world.
- What is taught and learned in RE is grounded in what is known about religion or non-religion from academic study. This helps prevent pupils from developing misconceptions about religion and non-religion.
- Pupils study certain areas of the RE curriculum in depth and acquire a range of detailed knowledge of different concepts and ideas, which they remember long term. Drawing on this prior knowledge enables them to consider more complex ideas about religion. Leaders and teachers select this ‘depth of study’ from contrasting religious and/or non-religious traditions so that pupils avoid developing misrepresentations.
- The curriculum is well sequenced to ensure that pupils learn the knowledge they need for later topics.
- There is a consideration of when pupils should relate the content to their own personal knowledge (for example, their own prior assumptions).
- How the curriculum is taught and assessed focuses pupils’ attention squarely on the knowledge they need to learn.
- Adequate curriculum time is given to RE, so that leaders can deliver an ambitious curriculum.
- There is sufficient training and professional development so that teachers have appropriate subject professional knowledge.

The review refers to 3 different types of subject-specific knowledge that pupils learn in RE. Each of these is powerful and should not be confused with ‘mere facts’. The first is ‘substantive’ knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions.

The second type is 'ways of knowing', where pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion. The third type is 'personal knowledge', where pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about what they study. The review suggests that improvement in RE at both primary and secondary level includes knowing more of these 'pillars of progression'. This prepares pupils to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular world.

In the spring term of 2022, we will be publishing a report on the quality of RE curriculums taught in schools. We will gather the evidence for this through subject 'deep dives' during inspections under the EIF.

Extracts from the report for discussion with teachers and school leaders

## **PRIORITISING RE IN THE CURRICULUM**

**The review includes a comprehensive appendix setting out the legal context of RE and inspection arrangements and reminds readers that all schools are required to teach RE to all pupils at all key stages (including sixth form), except for those withdrawn.**

**The review notes, “The way in which school leaders structure and plan ways to fulfil these obligations in school is one indication of the quality of education in RE.”**

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CPD AND SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE**

### **Examples of the advice offered in this area:**

1. "School leaders and subject leaders need to consider carefully the appropriate type of professional development to ensure that RE teachers have improved subject knowledge and are well placed to teach a high-quality RE curriculum."

2. "At primary and secondary level, pupils should be taught by teachers who have secure subject and curriculum knowledge"

**What are the implications of this statement in your context?**

**What questions do you have?**



## **SCHOOL DECISIONS THAT LIMIT HIGH QUALITY RE**

**....there are significant challenges that limit high quality in RE, including: insufficient time to teach an ambitious RE curriculum school decisions that are not taken in the best interests of all pupils, such as decisions concerning the statutory teaching of RE, the opportunity to take a qualification in religious studies, or early examination entry a lack of consideration about what it means to ‘be scholarly’ in objective, critical and pluralistic RE**

What are the implications of this statement  
in your context?

What questions do you have?



## **WEAK FRAMING**

**How the RE curriculum is classified may be another indication of the extent to which a school prioritises RE. ... Problems can emerge when RE is too weakly classified. Sometimes this can lead to its erosion in the curriculum. Some examples of RE being too weakly classified might be: at primary, a key stage 2 topic approach that provides pupils with a rich historical and geographical knowledge, but has relatively little RE content. At secondary, delivering RE through tutor times, assemblies or in conjunction with PSHE education, or in rotation with other subjects where the format of delivering RE limits the curriculum that pupils can learn.**

What are the implications of this statement  
in your context?

What questions do you have?



## **BALANCE**

**To consider the overall concept of religion and non-religion that pupils build through the curriculum is perhaps more useful than thinking about the quantity and weighting of traditions to include.**

**Equally, simply covering a greater number of religious and non-religious traditions (as inclusive as that sounds) is no guarantee of a high-quality RE curriculum. This overloads the curriculum and might lead to superficial caricatures of religious and non-religious traditions**

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



## **COLLECTIVELY ENOUGH**

**In subject terms, this requires that the RE curriculum comprises ‘collectively enough’ of the knowledge and skills that would amount to a high standard of subject education at primary and secondary level.**

What are the implications of this statement in your context?

What questions do you have?



## **THREE TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE**

**Although educators make different claims about the purpose of RE, it is nonetheless vital for subject leaders, curriculum designers and teachers to be aware of different types of knowledge in RE**

**First, ‘substantive’ knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions**

**Second, ‘ways of knowing’: pupils learn ‘how to know’ about religion and non-religion**

**Third, ‘personal knowledge’: pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study**

What are the implications of this statement  
in your context?

What questions do you have?

