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| <b>15 October 2014</b>   |                                 | <b>ITEM: 9</b> |
| <b>Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education</b>   |                                 |                |
| <b>The OFSTED Report: Realising The Potential</b>  |                                 |                |
| <b>Report of:</b> Deborah Weston, RE Consultant  |                                 |                |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All  | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>Non-key |                |
| <b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Mike Peter, (Interim Strategic Lead) School Improvement, Learning & Skills |                                 |                |
| <b>Accountable Director:</b> Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services                                 |                                 |                |
| <b>This report is public.</b>  |                                 |                |

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Report summary - Religious education: realising the potential**

Religious education (RE) should make a major contribution to the education of children and young people. At its best, it is intellectually challenging and personally enriching. It helps young people develop beliefs and values, and promotes the virtues of respect and empathy, which are important in our diverse society. It fosters civilised debate and reasoned argument, and helps pupils to understand the place of religion and belief in the modern world.

The past 10 years have seen some improvements in RE in schools. More pupils recognise its value and nearly two thirds of them left school with an accredited qualification in the subject in 2012. The range and quality of resources to support teaching in this subject are much better than they were.

However, evidence from the majority of schools visited for this survey shows that the subject's potential is still not being realised fully. Many pupils leave school with scant subject knowledge and understanding. Moreover, RE teaching often fails to challenge and extend pupils' ability to explore fundamental questions about human life, religion and belief.

Ofsted's previous report on RE in 2010, *Transforming religious education*, highlighted key barriers to better RE and made recommendations about how these should be overcome. The current survey found that not enough has been done since 2010.

The structures that underpin the local determination of the RE curriculum have failed to keep pace with changes in the wider educational world. As a result, many local authorities are struggling to fulfil their responsibility to promote high-quality religious education. In addition, other changes to education policy, such as the introduction in

2010 of the English Baccalaureate (the EBacc), have led to a decline in RE provision in some schools.

Part A of this report discusses eight major areas of concern:

- low standards
- weak teaching
- problems in developing a curriculum for RE
- confusion about the purpose of RE
- weak leadership and management
- weaknesses in examination provision at Key Stage 4
- gaps in training
- the impact of recent changes in education policy.

Part B of this report provides examples of effective practice in using enquiry as a basis for improving pupils' learning, high-quality leadership and management in primary and secondary schools, and effective approaches in special schools. Overall, however, such good practice is not sufficiently widespread.

The report is based on evidence drawn from 185 schools visited between September 2009 and July 2012. It also draws on evidence from a telephone survey of a further 30 schools, examination results, other reports published by Ofsted, extended discussions with teachers, members of standing advisory councils on religious education (SACREs) and other RE professionals, and wider surveys carried out by professional associations for RE. The sample of schools did not include voluntary aided schools or academies with a religious designation, for which separate inspection arrangements exist.

### **Key findings**

- Weaknesses in provision for RE meant that too many pupils were leaving school with low levels of subject knowledge and understanding.
- Achievement and teaching in RE in the 90 primary schools visited were less than good in six in 10 schools.
- Achievement and teaching in RE in the 91 secondary schools visited were only good or better in just under half of the schools. The picture was stronger at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3.
- Most of the GCSE teaching seen failed to secure the core aim of the examination specifications: that is, to enable pupils 'to adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion'.
- The provision made for GCSE in the majority of the secondary schools surveyed failed to provide enough curriculum time for pupils to extend and deepen their learning sufficiently.
- The teaching of RE in primary schools was not good enough because of weaknesses in teachers' understanding of the subject, a lack of emphasis on

subject knowledge, poor and fragmented curriculum planning, very weak assessment, ineffective monitoring and teachers' limited access to effective training.

- The way in which RE was provided in many of the primary schools visited had the effect of isolating the subject from the rest of the curriculum. It led to low-level learning and missed opportunities to support pupils' learning more widely, for example, in literacy.
- The quality of teaching in the secondary schools visited was rarely outstanding and was less than good in around half of the lessons seen. Common weaknesses included: insufficient focus on subject knowledge; an over-emphasis on a limited range of teaching strategies that focused simply on preparing pupils for assessments or examinations; insufficient opportunity for pupils to reflect and work independently; and over-structured and bureaucratic lesson planning with a limited focus on promoting effective learning.
- Although the proportion of pupils taking GCSE and GCE examinations in RE remains high, in 2011 nearly 250 schools and academies did not enter any pupils for an accredited qualification in GCSE.
- Around half of the secondary schools visited in 2011 and 2012 had changed, or were planning to change, their curriculum provision for RE in response to changes in education policy. The impact of these changes varied but it was rarely being monitored carefully.
- Assessment in RE remained a major weakness in the schools visited. It was inadequate in a fifth of the secondary schools and a third of the primary schools. Many teachers were confused about how to judge how well pupils were doing in RE.
- Access to high-quality RE training for teachers was poor. Training had a positive impact on improving provision in only a third of the schools visited; its impact was poor in a further third. Many of the schools surveyed said that support from their local authority and SACRE had diminished.
- Leadership and management of RE were good or better in half the schools visited; however, weaknesses were widespread in monitoring provision for RE and in planning to tackle the areas identified for improvement.
- The effectiveness of the current statutory arrangements for RE varies considerably. Recent changes in education policy are having a negative impact on the provision for RE in some schools and on the capacity of local authorities and SACREs to carry out their statutory responsibilities to monitor and support it.

**Main report published 6 October 2013**

[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130068](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130068)

## **1 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **That SACRE:**

#### **1.1 Accept this report at the termly meeting.**

**1.2 Agree to inform schools that the long report has been published by OfSTED.**

**1.3 Advise the local authority and schools of the recommendations as follows:**

**(i) Local authorities, in partnership with SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences, should:**

- ensure that sufficient resources are available for SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences to carry out their statutory functions with regard to RE and provide schools with high-quality guidance and support
- review their expectations about arrangements for RE, particularly at Key Stage 4, to ensure that schools have sufficient flexibility to match their provision more effectively to pupils' needs
- work in partnership with local schools and academies to build supportive networks to share best practice.

**(ii) All schools should:**

- ensure that learning in RE has a stronger focus on deepening pupils' understanding of the nature, diversity and impact of religion and belief in the contemporary world
- improve lesson planning so that teaching has a clear and straightforward focus on what pupils need to learn and engages their interest.

**(iii) Primary schools should:**

- raise the status of RE in the curriculum and strengthen the quality of subject leadership by improving the arrangements for developing teachers' subject expertise, sharing good practice, and monitoring the quality of the curriculum and teaching
- improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum to increase opportunities for pupils to work independently, make links with other subjects and tackle more challenging tasks.

**(iv) Secondary schools should:**

- ensure that the teaching of RE at GCSE level secures good opportunities for pupils to discuss and reflect on their learning, and extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of religion and belief

- ensure that the overall curriculum provision for RE is challenging and has greater coherence and continuity
- improve their monitoring of RE to ensure that any changes in provision are carefully evaluated in terms of their impact on pupils' progress and attainment.

**1.4 Instruct the adviser to send a discussion document about the report to all subject leaders in Thurrock (see appendix A).**

**2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

This report evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of religious education (RE) in primary and secondary schools and discusses the key issues at the heart of RE teaching today. It is based principally on evidence from visits to primary and secondary schools in England between 2009 and 2012. The sample of schools represented a cross-section, including voluntary controlled schools, but did not include voluntary aided schools, for which there are separate inspection arrangements.

**3 ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:**

Making schools aware of this report will:

- 3.1 Support council priorities to improve the guidance it provides to schools on Religious Education.
- 3.2 Support the council's policies on community cohesion.

**4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- 4.1 The recommendations are made in order to fulfil the responsibility of a SACRE to support high quality provision for RE.

**5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 Not applicable.

**6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 None.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**  
Telephone and email: **01375 652466**  
**kgoodacre@btinternet.com**

There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**  
Telephone and email: **Lucinda.bell@BDTLegal.org.uk**

This report does not require any decisions to be made. The basis for its recommendations are contained within it.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
Telephone and email: **01375652472**  
**Sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk**

SACRE is committed to supporting the Council's policies of social and community cohesion. In responding to this review, members will consider the changing religious and ethnic profile of Thurrock in this respond and respond accordingly.

### 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- OfSTED report on Religious Education 2013: Realising the potential

#### **Report Author Contact Details:**

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Associate Adviser for Religious Education

## Appendix A

### **The OfSTED report has been described as ‘a gift for RE’.**

#### **What use have you made of its publication in your school and networks?**

##### Ten Suggestions:

1. Have you put a copy of the report, with executive summary on top in your Headteacher and line manager’s pigeon hole? Are they aware of the new guidance offered to OfSTED inspectors? <http://tinyurl.com/omxf9ka>
2. Maintained Schools: Have you asked your SACRE about what advice they plan to offer to the local authority as a result of the publication of the report?
3. Academies in a chain or other partnership: Have you asked the management group what advice they plan to offer to the schools in the chain or partnership?
4. Do you have a supportive Head/ Principal who might be prepared to put the report on the Agenda of a local Head’s Consultative Group?
5. Is the report on the Agenda of a NATRE affiliated local group or other meeting of teachers of RE? Can you share ideas about how to improve RE on the basis of the recommendations?
6. If you work with an examination board, have you asked how they plan to respond to the report in the review of their specifications and how you can help?!
7. How will you incorporate the recommendations and main messages of the report into your next subject/departamental/faculty development plan?
8. Put the topic on the agenda for a staff/ departamental/management/governors’/ faculty meeting. Present the findings and discuss the following:
  - a. Primary focused question: To what extent do each of the elements in finding 6 apply to our school?
    - i. The teaching of RE in primary schools was not good enough because of weaknesses in teachers’ understanding of the subject, a lack of emphasis on subject knowledge, poor and fragmented curriculum planning, very weak assessment, ineffective monitoring and teachers’ limited access to effective training.
  - b. Secondary focused question: To what extent do each of the elements in finding 7 apply to our school?
    - i. The quality of teaching in the secondary schools visited was rarely outstanding and was less than good in around half of the lessons seen. Common weaknesses included: insufficient focus on subject knowledge; an over-emphasis on a limited range of teaching strategies that focused simply on preparing pupils for assessments or examinations; insufficient opportunity

for pupils to reflect and work independently; and over-structured and bureaucratic lesson planning with a limited focus on promoting effective learning.

9. Write to your MP to ask why there has been no Department for Education response to the previous (2010) OfSTED report and urge them to take action in response to this 2013 report? Encourage them to make contact with the All Party Parliamentary Group for RE (Stephen Lloyd MP)  
<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg>
10. Encourage your union to campaign on RE. See e.g. here from ATL  
<http://www.atl.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policies/curriculum-re.asp> Draft an article for their magazine that highlights good practice in RE.  
<https://www.facebook.com/NATREupdate>